**University of Alberta**

# Breasted Experience in Late-18th-Century Women's Writing and Medical Discourse

by

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## Abstract

This dissertation proposes that subjective bodily experience can be understood as a cultural object; in particular, a wide range of late-eighteenth-century texts depict historically and culturally situated forms of bodily subjectivity. My main target texts are Frances Burney's 1811 mastectomy account, the sentimental novel, Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*, and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In addition to these, I refer to anatomical treatises, the *Philosophical Transactions*, conduct literature, medical texts, poetry, natural histories, nursing manuals, and political tracts.

Based on this material, I identify three emergent principles: that culturally available beliefs in the mid- to late eighteenth century tended to overlook possible boundaries between mind, affect, and body; that it was possible during this period to believe that feelings, even physical feelings, could communicate between bodies; and that texts of this era demonstrate little concern with the 'crisis of representation.' I apply these principles to a reading of Edgeworth's *Belinda*, explaining that she radically problematizes attempts to understand the subjective experience of others, and thereby highlights the importance of epistemological modesty. I then argue that Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* repurposes an ontological strategy from medical discourse, and uses it to produce a feminist deployment of nature and the subjectivity of the maternal nursing breast. In conclusion, by taking into account the situatedness of her bodily subjectivity, I interpret Burney's mastectomy narrative as an attempt to communicate lived experience through text.

## Dedication

To Dr. Stanley Isaac Ruecker, at last.

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## Table of Contents

Introduction: "How it feels" 1

1. Body and subjectivity in late-eighteenth-century England: Recovering "how it felt" 36

2. The strange case of Lady Delacour's goldfish: *Belinda* and the epistemology of breastedness 80

3. A mother's feelings: Animals, women, and the nursing breast 115

Conclusion: Breast reconstruction 173

Works Cited 183

# List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Frontispiece to *Histoire de Dom B—* 72

Figure 2: "Different forms of glasses for drawing milk from the breasts of women" 121

Figure 3: Nipple guards 124

# Introduction: "How it feels"

This project began with Frances Burney's 1811 account of her mastectomy. It is a remarkable document for many reasons. One of the first that struck me appears in a footnote to the Joyce Hemlow edition of Burney's journals and letters: "cover . . . is *annotated by* FBA: Breast operation / Respect this / & Beware not to injure it!!!" (597). To whom was this addressed? What kind of disrespect or injury did Burney anticipate? And most intriguingly, did she write this because the breast she mentions was desecrated and destroyed? I tried to engage in an imaginative exercise of how it felt to be Frances Burney under the knife – what it would be like to undress before strangers, to breathe beneath a cambric handkerchief, to see a physician's hand mark in the air the shape of the future incisions. I found it impossible to imagine these things. There are any number of literary-critical reasons why I should fail: the limits of discourse, the death of the author, the historical, political, social, and cultural specificity that informs any text – and so on. The obstacle which actually defeated me, however, was something simpler. I couldn't bring myself to believe that it could ever be possible in any degree to know the subjective experience of another body, even one present with me, let alone one separated as far from me as Frances Burney's.

It was at that point I realized that I had no evidence or even authority for my opinion. On the contrary, if I can only judge of bodily subjectivity by my own, then I must admit that my opinion is mistaken. Having performed in front of an audience, for example, I know that the people in the chairs can be co-participants in a very literal sense. If I can judge by empirical science, the facts are even more compelling. In what one scientist calls "the single most important 'unreported' (or at least, unpublicized) story of the decade" (Ramachandran, "Mirror neurons and imitation learning"), researchers at the

University of Parma determined that certain brain neurons will react, not only to a particular motor activity, but to the sight of the same motor activity being performed by another. These "mirror neurons" even seem to be able to detect intentionality in the actions of others, and also to respond to language which describes actions. In Ramachandran's provocative phrase, "mirror neurons, it would seem, dissolve the barrier between self and others" ("Mirror neurons and the brain in the vat").[1] My ideas about how the body could be experienced were not just unexamined, but possibly as contingent as any other cultural belief.

This realization illuminated for me an unwieldy collection of thematic material which I had collected for use in my dissertation. The material consisted of texts of many genres from the mid- and late eighteenth century, all related to the breast. I recognized that the same curiosity which Burney's account raised in me motivated my interest in accumulating texts in which breasts were hidden in boudoirs, debated in public, or described as capable of transmuting blood, breeding worms, or imitating penises.[2] I was curious to know how it felt to have these breasts, and if the way a body feels is a cultural object, then there was a way in which this could be known.

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[1] For more information, see: Vittorio Gallese et al., "Action recognition in the premotor cortex" (*Brain* 119 (1996): 593–609); Leonardo Gallese et al., "Parietal lobe: From action organization to intention understanding" (*Science* 308 (2005): 662–7); and Marco Tettamanti et al., "Listening to action-related sentences activates fronto-parietal motor circuits" (*J Cognitive Neuroscience* 17 (2005): 273–81).

[2] On the breast's ability to transmute blood, see John Maubray's *The Female Physician* (London, 1730), p. 329–30. On the breast breeding worms and other objects, see Nicholas Culpeper's *Directory for Midwives* (London, 1701), p. 327. On the nursing breast's connections with the penis, see Simon Richter's "Wet-nursing, onanism, and the breast in eighteenth-century Germany" (*J Hist Sexuality* 7.1 (July 1996): 1–22).

Accessing this knowledge could involve a number of research strategies. Reconstruction is one of the most attractive, since it offers the hope that one could experience personally what another individual has reported. Reconstituting a particular lived experience, however, becomes more difficult, not less, if one conceptualizes "how it feels" as a cultural object, rather than a universal, ahistorical characteristic of human bodies. If pain, for example, is situated in the same way that gender is situated, it is not enough for me to cut myself, or have myself cut, to have an inkling of what Frances Burney went through. It is what *she* felt under the knife, and not what anyone would feel under the knife, which constitutes my target. Material contexts alone present a grave obstacle to direct equations such as "I feel just as she did." To use a less drastic example than Burney's surgery, knowing how it felt to hear Clara Schumann play her first solo concert, for example, involves material conditions that are very difficult to reproduce. One would need a functioning replica of the particular piano technology she employed, and access to the venue(s) in which she actually performed. Even where material contexts can be reconstructed with a fair degree of completeness and accuracy, this is not enough to replicate the feelings involved. One would need to know, in detail and with certainty, what the nature of that feeling's location in space and time meant, to someone present at the *Gewandhaus* in 1830. One would need a pianist deeply learned in the theory and technique of the performance style peculiar to this young piano prodigy, and further, as a listener, one would need a thorough education in the musical tastes of the period. Given all these things, one might be able to produce a rough parallel to the experience of being in Clara Schumann's audience, in the same way that the reconstructed Globe Theatre offers a rough parallel to the experience of watching Shakespeare's company perform one of his plays. If one wants to know "how it felt" to a particular historical individual, however, this produces further complexity. How did Clara Schumann feel, when she first performed her Opus 27 piano concerto? How did Richard Burbage feel, treading the boards at the Globe? If we reject the idea of a universal, ahistorical body of feelings, then we must also accept the possibility that we may never have direct knowledge of "how it felt" to be that person, at that moment, in that place.

Granting, however, that this kind of exhaustive knowledge may be unattainable, I would argue there is still a good deal to study and analyze. In the same way that the terms "woman" or "England" are constantly in motion, and constructed at least partly out of contention and opposition, "how it feels," as a cultural object, will have the same elusiveness. The indeterminate quality of these terms, however, is exactly what makes them fertile ground for research. It may still be possible to draw solid conclusions about how it felt to be Burney under the knife, by analyzing how her description draws on or resists the ideologies of body and subjectivity which surrounded her, and how these differ from our own.

My dissertation therefore deals with subjective bodily experience as a cultural object. In particular, I deal with texts from the mid- to late eighteenth century, with special emphasis on the breast in this period. In Chapter 1, I argue that subjective bodily experience is a cultural object, just like gender, and I identify three emergent principles, which can inform readings of this material. The first principle is that culturally available beliefs in the mid- to late eighteenth century tended to overlook possible boundaries between mind, affect, and body. Where these boundaries were acknowledged, they were often represented as very permeable. People could think with their bodies, and judge with their bodies; their feelings could be their logic, and their thoughts could be a disease. The second principle is that it was possible during this period to believe that feelings of all kinds could communicate between bodies. Not everyone had the capacity, but it was nonetheless possible to share another person's subjective experiences, literally. The third principle is that texts of this era demonstrate little concern with the "crisis of representation": the possibility that, because "the human mind . . . permanently constructs its own world, then representation can only be of a self-referential nature" (Nöth 12–13). If a mid-to-late-eighteenth century sentimental author felt something while he or she wrote, the text was perfectly capable of transmitting this subjective experience to the body of a perceptive reader, without raising questions as to exactly how this happened, or where the text's referents were actually located.

In Chapter 2, I look at the effects this cultural warrant for a permeable, communicable bodily subjectivity had upon the period's epistemology of body and self. Mid- to late-eighteenth-century science embraced the idea that certain kinds of knowledge were only available with reference to the bodily subjectivity of others. Using Edgeworth's *Belinda*, which is well informed with both contemporary science and the politics of bodily difference, I examine the novel as an extended set of witty demonstrations. These demonstrations constitute an education in both the difficulty and the importance of understanding the feelings of a body very different from one's own. Ultimately, both Edgeworth and her contemporaries in natural philosophy express a fundamental, though guarded, optimism that sensitive observation could resolve epistemological deadlocks involving body and self.

In Chapter 3, I address the particular case of the role of nature in discussions of mid-to-late-eighteenth-century nursing literature. By "nursing literature," I mean texts of the period, across many genres, which depict the nursing breast. Close examination of the medical discourse of this literature, with regard to how it represents bodily subjectivity, demonstrates a pervasive difference between those texts published at mid-century and those produced in the late 1700s. Both corpora use a rhetorical strategy of seizing the ontological high ground to evade the epistemological issues that emerge when a male authority describes maternal behaviour. By claiming the right to pronounce upon *what* other bodies feel, these texts avoid questions as to *how* they know what other bodies feel. This tactic appears in representations of bodies marked by species-, class-, or 'race'-based difference, and also in constructions of the nursing mother. In spite of these similarities, however, mid-century depictions of how and what a nursing mother experiences differ substantially from those later in the century. Mid-century texts employ an orderly, mechanistic model of nature, of which maternal nursing forms a logical part. A mother who does not breastfeed must therefore have some basic moral flaw which places her in opposition to nature's laws. These texts propose surveillance by men expert in nature's ways as a solution, but they also propose the existence of a specific kind of experience, unique to the bodily subjectivity of nursing mothers. This introduces some epistemological awkwardness, since none of the male experts can corroborate the existence of such feelings without at least some reference to what some specific mother has actually felt while breastfeeding. Later texts depict maternal nursing, not as a law, but as an organic process uniting all lactating female animals. By relegating maternal nursing to the realm of instinctive behaviours, these texts remove subjectivity as on of its . Whether the mother feels or not has no impact on her nursing behaviour, since all mothers nurse, by definition. A woman who bears a child and does not nurse it is therefore a monster. I then suggest a reading of Mary Wollstonecraft's contributions to late-eighteenth-century nursing literature, identifying a direct political challenge to male authority in this area, using the same ontological strategy to produce a feminist deployment of nature and the subjectivity of the maternal nursing breast.

In conducting this research, I have not restricted myself to any one category of texts. I have mined sentimental novels, anatomical treatises, the *Philosophical Transactions*, conduct literature, medical texts, poetry, natural histories, nursing manuals, and political tracts. I have given a relatively small place to genres of self-reportage, such as letters, journals, and diaries (Burney's mastectomy narrative excepted). It seems obvious that these materials hold promise for research into feeling, with their assumption of self-revelation. Doesn't Burney simply say, after all, how it felt? This is exactly the kind of assumption I want to interrogate. Every affective term Burney uses is situated, and subject to the same political pressures that shape, for example, what Wollstonecraft means when she writes "mother." At this point in my research, it seems premature to address self-reporting literature. Without some reasonably well-defined ideas about the context of such documents, they would be difficult to interpret. How could I distinguish when the writer is being literal, or idiosyncratic, or reactionary? I would argue that these kinds of questions are best addressed from a vantage point in the texts' historical and cultural environment.

This is not to say that this dissertation's quest for "how it feels" is primarily a project in cultural critique. In the first place, the constructs which permit a distinction between culture (as 'real-life' manifestation) and literature (as textual representation) are, I would suggest, foreign to late-eighteenth-century England. At this particular time and place (as I will argue in detail in Chapter 1), having a feeling, interpreting a feeling, and reading about a feeling were interrelated and permeable categories of experience. This complex co-creation involved writer, reader, and social environment, and thus resists the techniques and presuppositions of either cultural or literary critique, taken as exclusive categories. Further, where this dissertation does make use of the techniques and assumptions of cultural critique, it does so in the service of literary criticism. I return, for example, to Burney's mastectomy narrative in my Conclusion, to provide a sample of the ways in which identifying and analyzing the particularity of "how it felt" helps to inform and enrich my literary reading of her text. There were elements I eventually took at face value which once I would have read as rhetorical; others which I had previously taken to be unremarkable, I now found to be highly nuanced. By researching exactly what it meant to have a feeling at the time Burney's account was written, it became possible to distinguish shades of difference in her description, which my previous readings had overlooked. Cultural analysis of "how it feels" makes a certain kind of literary analysis possible.

The particular idea I wanted to test, that the lived experience of embodiment had and has history and cultural meaning, made it necessary to read between texts. An ideology successful enough to become all but transparent rarely gets its own article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, or its own entry in the *Encyclopédie*. The situatedness of bodily subjectivity in eighteenth-century literature does not appear in direct treatments; it appears instead in the diverse collection of ways in which this literature represents bodily subjectivity as independent of historical and cultural contexts. This diversity is more visible between texts and genres than within any one source.

By "reading between texts," however, I mean more than comparative reading between genres. I had to read the situatedness of my own concept of bodily subjectivity in order to address that of the mid- to late eighteenth century. My target texts were loaded politically and culturally with ideas and representations that my own ideas about embodiment and subjectivity had led me to reject or simply ignore. There is a way of reading literature that tacitly grants its literariness, particularly in genres so notoriously over-the-top as sentimental novels or political polemics. Texts written "for effect" seem to discredit themselves with their reliance on rhetoric, and this is especially true when an author describes a kind of subjectivity that is foreign to the reader – one in which "every beat of [one's] heart awakes a virtue!" (Mackenzie 93), and "doleful stories" produce "fainting and general convulsions" (Whytt 10–11). The more I found out, however, about what it was possible for a woman like Frances Burney to believe – about her feelings and her body and what made her into herself – the more inclined I was to take literally passages I had once considered figurative. If an author says that a doleful story put someone into convulsions, perhaps he or she means it. If Burney says that, during her mastectomy, she "literally felt" someone's finger while it was "elevated over the wound" (612–13), then perhaps she literally felt it. For her, there wasn't necessarily a reason to think this impossible.

One of my primary contentions, therefore, has become that in order to understand body and subjectivity in late-eighteenth-century literature, the reader needs to exercise some willingness to identify and set aside his or her own beliefs about what a body, a mind, or a self really is, and to consider the possibility that representations that may seem exaggerated or purely figurative may actually be genuine depictions of lived experience. No single piece of evidence would be sufficient to prove this contention, but I have amassed a web of contemporary sources which I believe justifies taking such texts at their word more often.

This kind of highly nuanced reading is only an expansion upon existing scholarship in body theory, and in particular, feminist body theory. During the 1980s and

90s, academics undertook the complex task of re-positioning women's bodies within literary theory. That collection of critical principles and techniques loosely termed 'post-modern' had already established the notion that (apparently) unitary terms, such as "history" or "subject," could be deconstructed and analyzed. Certain scholarly feminists (e.g., Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler)[3] recognized the strategic potential post-modernism offered for destabilizing such socially defining terms as "sex," "gender," and "woman." Since these social definitions share a reliance on what one well-known text calls a "biologically inevitable and unquestionable" material body (Smith-Rosenberg 289), a post-modern interrogation of the body necessarily formed an important part of this overall project.

Butler, in particular, produced a influential account of the body by arguing that matter is simply that which is posited *in* language as being prior to language:

> The body is always *posited* or *signified* as prior. . . . If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification. ("Bodies that matter" 144)

Her emphasis on the "performative" draws on J.L. Austin's theory of performative language. As outlined in the 1962 book *How to Do Things with Words*, this theory attempts to define a category of speech acts which have illocutionary as well as perlocutionary effects: "in which *by* saying something we do something" (Austin 30). Butler, however, elaborates Austin's relatively simple linguistic taxonomy into a more complex concept. She argues that, in the same way that a performative speech act produces a literal effect (e.g., by saying "you are under arrest," a police officer literally arrests a person), the performance of gender, and not an extra-lingual material body, produces the effects of gender in any individual: "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (*Gender Trouble* 140).

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[3] Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (NY: Routledge, 1990) continues to challenge and inspire feminists and body theorists with its interrogations of materiality and gender, while

This representation of gender as a set of performative acts suggests, for Butler, specific tactics for destabilizing gender as a category. Parodic performances of gender – "subversive repetition[s] within signifying practices of gender" (146) – offer, according to her, a tool capable of demonstrating the instability of terms such as "male" and "female," "woman" and "man": "[i]n the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity" (137–8). As examples, she points to "parodic" gender practices such as cross-dressing or butch/femme sexual role-playing (137). Further, she argues that the body itself consists of a dynamic interaction between matter and mind: "the very contours of the body are sites which vacillate between the psychic and the material. Bodily contours and morphology are not merely implicated in an irreducible tension between the psychic and the material but are that tension" (*Bodies* 66).

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Braidotti's intense focus on how theories of gender, body, and subjectivity relate "to the lived experiences of real-life women" (203) have maintained and expanded the political relevance of feminism.

To some feminists, Butler's concepts of performative gender suggested that the body itself is fluid, indeterminate, and capable of almost limitless redefinition. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, for example, identified the archetype of performative gender subversion as the Trickster, a character "of indeterminate sex and changeable gender . . . [a] creative force at war with convention, beyond gender . . . constitut[ing] the ideal feminist hero" (291). In a more extreme formulation, Donna Haraway proposed a full transcendence of gender by means of a cyborg body, "an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency" which "can be dispersed and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways" (150, 163).

As Elaine Scarry points out, however, disembodiment is a traditional sign of power: "to have no body is to have no limits on one's extension out into the world . . . to be intensely embodied . . . is almost always the condition of those without power" (207). The temptation to stage a conquest of this power position, by disclaiming one's own body, is obvious. Faced with Reagan/Mulroney-era political intransigence on multiple fronts, many of which involved bodily difference (e.g., abortion access, maternity leave, female military service (Faludi 235–7, 257–63, 414–8)), North American feminists in the 1980s and 90s may have been the more ready to welcome an "ideal feminist hero" whose protean emancipation from her body made her a strong potential ally in their struggle to disrupt dominant discourse. Critics such as Susan Bordo, however, questioned the legitimacy of this "post-modern body" ("Feminism, post-modernism, and gender-skepticism" 144) as a long-term conceptual construct for understanding embodiment:

> To deny the unity and stability of identity is one thing. The epistemological fantasy of *becoming* multiplicity . . . is another. What sort of body is it that is free to change its shape and location at will, that can become anyone and travel

> everywhere? If the body is a metaphor for our locatedness in space in time and thus for the finitude of human perception and knowledge, then the post-modern body is no body at all. (145)

Bordo's criticism only echoes earlier reactions to Austin's theory of performative speech as a kind of linguistic wishful thinking. "I can't fry an egg by saying, 'I fry an egg,' but I can promise to come and see you just by saying, 'I promise to come and see you' . . . Now why the one and not the other?" philosopher John Searle asked. "The limitations on the class that determine which will succeed and which will fail derive from facts about how the world works" (74, 93). The facts about how the world works, Bordo insists, include substantial evidence that the body, material or not, is a nexus for the exercise of power, and that a mere act of imaginative will cannot render the body immune to power's effects. Body, she argues, is constituted through "ongoing political struggle rather than through an act of creative interpretation" (*Unbearable Weight* 263).

Political objections to the post-modern body extended beyond Bordo's critique. A contingent, performance-based concept of the body, some argued, re-silences women by denying their materiality – removing female physicality from discourse and replacing it with more tractable theoretical substitutes. Germaine Greer, for one, blasted post-modernists (among others) for attempting the obliteration of "real women" (3) and their bodies:

> If freedom is an out-of-body experience this feminist wants none of it. This female eunuch wants to be at ease in her body, unembarrassed about her body, proud and protective of her body, the body she has now. . . . The female body is not our enemy but our strength. (418)

Similarly, Tania Modleski warned that the post-modern body could easily serve as a substitute for previous unitary notions of material gender: if the post-modern body is one "in which differences are elided," she argued, it can "easily lead us back into our 'pregendered' past where there was only the universal subject – man" (163).

Even those who agreed with Butler's basic premise (that no aspect of materiality is prior to language) were not always prepared to admit this insight into their political practice as feminists. M. E. Bailey, for example, calls for a "strategic essentialism" which would posit a material female body wherever political expediency dictated – a fictional, unitary 'woman' suitable for "careful and minimalist deployment . . . for concrete gains for example, in women's struggles around health, abortion, maternity, rape" (116). Bailey's use of the term "concrete," however, illustrates the difficulties contingent upon maintaining one discourse for use in "the effort to change the terms of debate," and another for application "within very specific institutional settings where the terms of debate are already circumscribed" (119). How can the concept of a fictional essence be sustained without affirming the existence of an actual essence beyond the boundaries of that category, however "careful" its deployment? Further, and perhaps more distressingly, strategic essentialism appears to concede as much as critics like Bordo could wish regarding the pragmatic political inefficacy of the post-modern body. An infinite, polymorphous body that has to keep its mouth shut at the bi-monthly equity committee meeting doesn't seem like a good body for feminists.

Are feminist scholars of the body, then, caught in a deadlock between a concept of materiality that denies the reality of bodily experience, and a revamped essentialism that risks endorsing categories such as "female" or "woman"? Historically, feminists have tended to repudiate ideologies of essential bodily difference. The advent of the post-modern body, however, appears to have startled some academics into re-evaluating whether feminist politics can operate without positing at least some sort of material basis for the term "woman." This re-evaluation's propensity to self-organize into various sets of antitheses (essentialism/constructivism, materialism/idealism, etc.) is, however, somewhat puzzling. The project of locating the body presents, after all, more than antithetical alternatives; there is terrain beyond the sometimes irresponsible *jouissance* of Haraway's cyborg and Bordo's life-in-the-trenches narrowness. Butler herself maintains that "the options for theory are not exhausted by *presuming* materiality, on the one hand, and *negating* materiality, on the other" (*Bodies* 390).

The development of antithetical binaries must, in any case, be suspect. The structure of "either/or" necessarily produces the reductive logic of a dichotomous key; the function of an antithetical binary is to exclude all but two possibilities from the terms of discourse. This is the point Butler makes when she argues that "binary oppositions are formulated through the exclusion of a field of disruptive possibilities" ("Bodies that matter" 149). Thus, when the canny Butler, deep in a line of reasoning, has to resort to a representation which opposes the terms "psychic" and "material" (*Bodies* 66–67), one wonders just how disruptive these other bodily possibilities must be, to require suppression by binary oppositions so pervasive and intransigent. The very terms of debate seem to acknowledge a universal, ahistorical opposition between body and mind. What strong attractors (to borrow a phrase from fractal geometry) have been shaping body theory to produce a pattern of symmetrical oppositions?[4]

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[4] Polarization in the 1980s and 90s was not limited to feminist body theory; as Rosi Braidotti maintains, Anglo-American and Continental feminisms also became "fixed and stalemated" during this period (37).

*It could be that, rather than strong attractors, there are strong repulsions. In* particular, I find in contemporary body theory a reluctance to reference empirical science, because, historically, empirical research has underpinned theories of body and self which justify political oppression, ranging from inequitable domestic arrangements to outright genocide. The body framed in biological discourse has useful things to say about just how much of our lived experience takes place clandestinely, in things like dopamine or estrogen or DNA. Unfortunately, it's a slippery slope from this kind of discussion to the point where we are talking about the skull conformation of Jews. Nonetheless, by completely unpinning body theory from empirical science, we rob ourselves of the imaginative possibilities contained in biological discourse, and of a large body of evidence produced and accepted by fellow scholars. To argue that body theory should multiply its points of contact with empirical science is not to concede an essential body; in this, as in other aspects of body, there is room to consider more than poles of difference. To a limited extent, these contacts already exist. If I were to propose as a dissertation topic "Theorizing the Body as Tree," I think I would have a hard sell, based on acknowledged and substantial differences between, for instance, red blood cells and chloroplasts. As Searle says, even within the creative power of language, we acknowledge some things about the way the world works.

There are ways to conceptualize the interactions of self with environment which do not immediately commit to binaries such as materialism vs. constructivism. Certain biologists are themselves interested in the issues of bodily ontology and epistemology addressed in body theory; their own theoretical constructions are well worth examining for possibilities beyond binary opposition. The work of Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana, for instance, suggests there is a model in which sharply differing interpretations of self and environment can communicate in an effective, though limited, way. In particular, the relationship I propose between body theory and empirical science is well described in his phrase "mutual ontogenic structural coupling" (qtd. Winograd and Flores 48).[5] This concept suggests that interactions between self and environment (including other individuals) can be mediated through a consensual domain of perceptual and cognitive mechanisms. Whether the context in which these mechanism are deployed is 'real' or constructed is not of primary importance in this model; the function of the mutual ontogenic structural coupling depends only on the cooperation and phylogeny of the individuals involved. Language itself is a classic example of a mutual ontogenic structural coupling.

Maturana's own example involved frog vision. A frog cannot actually see insects, he discovered through experiment – it sees moving dots. By coupling the perceptual (and in a limited way, cognitive) experience of seeing a moving dot with the aspects of "insect" which are of primary importance to a frog – namely, that it might be food – the moving dot permits the frog to take effective action within its environment. The entity at which the frog shoots its sticky tongue may be a fat fly, or it may be a moving image of a dot on a white screen, deployed by a deceitful Chilean scientist (Winograd and Flores 98–99). Whether or not the insect is 'real' is of secondary importance; the scientist and the frog are able to communicate "insect" to each other by means of mutual ontogenic structural coupling. The two organisms' interlocking patterns of behavior form a consensual domain – a system of orienting behaviors which both participants can employ.

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[5] For a more detailed explanation of Maturana's model, see Terry Winograd, and Fernando Flores, *Understanding Computers and Cognition: A New Foundation for Design* (Norwood NJ: Ablex, 1986), Chapter 4.

*This is the kind of communication* that body theory and empirical science could embrace for their mutual benefit, if shared domains for communicating "body" could be located. Whether or not the body which uses epinephrine to increase its heart rate is as 'real' (or less 'real' or more 'real') than the one which performs gender may be less important than what shared domain(s) link the two. The point, in Maturana's words, is to create a "a consensual domain of behavior between interacting systems, through the development of a cooperative domain of interactions" – not to determine a single "independent universe about which we can talk" (50). Empirical science is not the only discourse with which body theory might profitably investigate the potential for shared domains, but certain recent developments in biology and its sister sciences suggest that this might be an opportune time to make this particular attempt.

In spite of a traditional aversion to biological discourse within feminism, some feminist critics, along with literary critics from other fields, are currently urging a rapprochement with the sciences. In a recent issue of *Critical Inquiry*, for example, academics ranging from Mary Poovey to Bruno Latour call for the formation of new relationships between scientific and humanistic endeavors; "the opportunities for important work at the intersection of the new sciences and the old humanities are almost limitless," one contributor argues (Neer 474). The gap between body theory and empiricism seems, at the moment, particularly acute, due to a sudden burst of discovery in the body sciences. For most of the twentieth century, neurological research was relatively one-sided in that the body (i.e., the brain and nervous system) was studied mainly as a possible explicant for the 'mind.' New technologies (such as functional magnetic resonance imaging), however, have led brain researchers to revise radically the ways they view the role of the body in consciousness and subjectivity.

More accurate and detailed observations of neural activity have revealed that many phenomena traditionally believed to be purely mental can and do operate at a 'bodily' (e.g., neural) level; even cognition itself can no longer be considered a process confined to the self-perceiving 'mind' (Churchland 48). The conscious mind, for example, is demonstrably too slow in recognizing linguistic elements to account for the speed with which the average listener can grasp the meaning of a set of spoken words – contrary to the self-perception that one consciously listens and understands, language comprehension appears to be largely a function of unconscious neural activity (Zeman 30). In a very literal sense, then, a substantial portion of the 'mind' *is* the body, and a growing consensus among neurophysiologists maintains that the study of 'mind' needs to expand beyond even bodily limits, to incorporate social and environmental factors as well (Zeman 30–34, Jarvilehto 36)).

Insofar as this new research has had an impact upon theories of consciousness, some humanists have already begun to locate shared domains that acknowledge its findings. The new field of neurophilosophy, for example, has begun exploring the implications of neurophysiology with regard to such concepts as self-reference and free will: where must a philosopher locate "choice," for example, if all voluntary activity has a substantial component of non-conscious (i.e., bodily) cognition (Churchland 211)? Every moment, our bodies are noticing and responding to stimuli far below the limits of conscious perception; they are recognizing unnoticed faces and interpreting unheard sounds. While our ever-tardy consciousness hesitates which object we will grasp, our eyes have already chosen a target and our hands have readied themselves (Kinsbourne 207). Even while our consciousness is smothered in sleep, or under deep anaesthesia, our ears are listening and our skin is alert, observing, thinking, and making decisions (Zeman

21–23). The reality of lived bodies appears to be mutually negotiated and maintained by the body, the conscious self, and the environment, in a complex co-relationship that neurophysiological pioneer Francisco Varela describes as "a meshwork of entirely co-determining elements" (qtd. Rudrauf et al. 40).

The ways in which we represent these co-relations to ourselves, and the roles our social, cultural, and political environments play in these representations, constitute a cultural object which could very well generate consensual domains for body theory and empiricism, materialism and constructivism – despite the substantially (and perhaps incorrigibly) different formalized representations of body extant within these fields, and within body theory itself. "Experts," says Maturana, "do not need to have formalized representations in order to act" (qtd. Winograd and Flores 99). The frog doesn't have to know if the insect is 'real,' or even have a clear cognitive model of what an "insect" is. It just needs to use its tongue and find out.

It also seems possible that, by excluding empirical constructions of the body, body theory might exclude the body itself. A resistance to the totalizing discourse of biology can become a resistance to embodiment – in fact, somatophobia: fear of the body.[6] That somatophobia might be a contributing factor to the polarizations within body theory appears in the fact that constructivist and materialist positions, as they radicalize, *share* a tendency to denigrate and/or deny the body (Butler, *Bodies* 10). When constructivism celebrated tattooing as "a way to configure radical difference in rewarding, self-confirming ways" (Braunberger 2); the proliferation of cyberporn as "the promise of strategic resistance" (Uebel 7); and sado-masochism as a way to "facilitate a process of coming to realize that the self is . . . a construct" (Hart 104), it distanced itself from the subjective feelings of the lived body with what seems an excessive rigor. Tattooing *hurts*[7] – as does a whipping, though delivered at the highest level of political enlightenment. And while constructivists have successfully theorized various kinds of disembodiment or bodily trauma (pain, disease, anorexia, evacuation), one looks in vain for a corresponding body of work addressing sleep, orgasm, habit, appetite, or the intense bodily mindfulness that characterizes many domain knowledges: wine-taster, parfumeur/-euse, musician, painter, martial artist.[8] Judging from its choice of topics, the constructivist take on the body is, in general, antipathetic.

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[6] Elizabeth V. Spelman's "Woman as body: Ancient and contemporary views" (*Feminist Studies* 8.1 (Spring 1982): 109–132) was highly influential in propagating this concept within feminist discourse. The

Materialist advocates of the lived body are, however, not immune to somatophobia in their own analyses. Bordo's formulation, for example, presents embodiment in terms of an almost Cartesian dualism, in which a progressive, purposive consciousness is threatened by a body subordinated to dominant discourse. Quoting Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, she argues:

> Banally, through table manners and toilet habits, through seemingly trivial routines, rules, and practices, culture is "*made* body," as Bourdieu puts it –

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term "somatophobia" also has a limited technical use within medicine and psychology, where it means "fear of touch" (OED).

[7] I speak here from personal experience.

[8] A number of interesting studies of dance stand as exceptions to this claim (e.g., Betty Block and Judith Lee Kissell, "The dance: Essence of embodiment" (*Theoretical Medicine* 22.1 (Jan. 2001): 5–15) and Susan McClary, "Unruly passions and courtly dances: Technologies of the body in Baroque music" (*From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*. Ed. Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg. Berkeley: U of California P, 1998), pp. 85–112.

> converted into automatic, habitual activity. As such it is put "beyond the grasp of consciousness . . . [untouchable] by voluntary, deliberate transformation." Our conscious politics, social commitments, strivings for change may be undermined and betrayed by the life of our bodies – not the craving, instinctual body imagined by Plato, Augustine, and Freud, but what Foucault calls "the docile body," regulated by the norms of cultural life. ("The body and the reproduction of femininity" 13)

This image of a collaborationist body, capable of overthrowing every conscious attempt to challenge culture, is an alarming one. Bordo intensifies this atmosphere of threat, stating that the body's disciplines cast "a dark and disquieting shadow across the contemporary scene," one that eventually "may lead us to utter demoralization, debilitation, and death" (14). In another formulation of the lived body, Susan Wendell offers a less frightening, but equally somatophobic view, emphasizing the role of suffering in the experience of embodiment. She tenders a salutary caution against the "danger of idealizing 'the body' and erasing much of the reality of lived bodies," yet her insistence that "we must recognize that awareness of the body is often awareness of pain, discomfort, or physical difficulty" (325–6) offers little incentive for investigating this reality more closely. Ultimately, her logic leads her to reinvest in an Augustinian concept of bodily transcendence: "[i]n short, I am learning not to identify myself with my body, and this helps me to live a good life" (329). Her assertion that "meaningless physical suffering increases freedom, because it expands the possibilities of experience beyond the miseries and limitations of the body" (332) seems oddly self-defeating as a strategy for avoiding "alienation from bodily experience" (324).

Somatophobia's appearance at the poles of difference which frame body theory's binary oppositions could be the result of an inherent somatophobia, within the models underlying these oppositions, which only intensifies enough to be perceptible when positions radicalize. Three of body theory's influential models do seem to contain the potential for somatophobia in their very structure. These three models depict the body as though it were, respectively: an instrument; subjectively imperceptible; or immune to humanities research.

First, body theory has, since its early days, employed metaphors of the body as a tool. Marcel Mauss's groundbreaking "Techniques of the body" (1935), for example, acknowledges the impact of culture upon the body, but does so by likening the body to a shovel or an engine: "man's first and most natural instrument" (75). This imagery retains an influential role in modern body theory. It informs, for example, critical formulations of post-humanism (e.g., "the post-human view . . . thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate" (Hayles 2)) and forms the basis for certain radical interpretations of gender performativity (e.g., "this feminist performative would require not only genuine celebration of but *actual* participation in the fleshly mutations needed to produce what the culture constitutes as 'ugly' so as to destabilize 'beautiful'" (Morgan 46)).[9] Imagining the body as an instrument, however, promotes a tendency to consider it wholly object, sharply limiting the ways in which the body can be seen as an agent, rather than as the means by which a disjunct, non-bodily 'self' can express its agency.

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[9] French performance artist Orlan probably represents the limit case of this kind of bodily instrumentality. Kathy Davis provides a summary and analysis of Orlan's public cosmetic surgery performances ("'My body is my art': Cosmetic surgery as feminist utopia?" (*Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body*. Ed. Kathy Davis. London: Sage, 1997), pp. 454–65. For images of Orlan's work, see <www.orlan.net>.

Second, a non-trivial corpus of work within body theory maintains that the body is, under ideal conditions, subjectively imperceptible. Explicit formulations of this idea range from folk psychology's 'sore thumb' arguments (canonized in Woolf's *On Being Ill* and Freud's "On Narcissism") to Drew Leder's claim that "the body tends to disappear when functioning unproblematically" (74).[10] As Butler points out, however, the founding narratives of psychoanalysis also echo this idea, in that they maintain that the development of bodily mindfulness constitutes a traumatic intrusion on the psyche. Butler notes that Freud's *The Ego and the Id* "state[s] quite clearly that bodily pain is the precondition of bodily self-discovery" (*Bodies* 58); reading the negative space surrounding this claim, it seems clear that a pain-free existence would be bodiless as well. Lacan and Kristeva retain and expand the association of bodily awareness with pain, extrapolating from Freud's statement to a narrative of infant development in which "the early infant is unable to distinguish between its own body and that of the mother" – a state of affairs eventually interrupted by a process of abjection (Price and Shildrick 6–7). Awareness of the individual body, in this formulation, necessarily interrupts and destroys. The narratives of psychoanalysis constitute, perhaps, not so much an explicit denial of the body's immanence in conscious life – a denial which would undoubtedly surprise many dancers and athletes – as an elegy for the life preceding "bodily self-discovery": a lost Eden characterized by the absence of bodily mindfulness.

Finally, various critical formulations of the body follow Descartes in excluding the subjective experience of embodiment from any central role in legitimate academic research. In Meditation VI of *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes focuses on the subjective nature of embodiment, noting that his body "belonged to me more properly and strictly than any other . . . . I experienced pain and pleasure in its parts and not in those of other bodies which are separated from it" (72). The radical idiosyncrasy of one's own bodily experience, he argued, renders this experience an unfit basis for forming conclusions about the world; "it is the business of the mind alone," he concluded, ". . . to decide the truth" (78). The influence of Cartesian philosophy is not, in general, directly visible in modern body theory; anti-Cartesianism has been the order of the literary-critical day for some time (Price and Shildrick 12). As Lauren Berlant points out in a recent article, however, critical interest in the body during the 1980s and 90s has produced a reaction in which "the business of the mind" is given more weight; "a certain disenchantment" with the body-specific work of race, gender and queer theorists is currently producing a critical drift towards categories (such as "globalization" or "ethics") that ensure "the distance from the body that traditionally secures the prestige of critical thought" (445). This "disenchantment" echoes Cartesian distrust of the body as a source of legitimate knowledge.

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[10] There is, of course, a logical error in equating a failure to observe with the lack of anything observable. By accepting the absence of bodily mindfulness as a norm of subjectivity, one necessarily excludes the products of such mindfulness.

Of these three models, the most pervasive and politically divisive is the last. Reactionary politics aside, the idea that subjective bodily experience is not a fit object for academic study can hamstring even good-faith attempts to address the concerns raised by critics such as Bordo and Greer about the role of the "reality of lived bodies" in body theory. The field has yet to produce, for example, an efficient interrogation of the assumption that the subjective experience of embodiment is, in the first place, fundamentally incommunicable. Elaine Scarry's influential theorization of pain uses this assumption as one of its primary axioms: "whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability . . . . [I]t achieves its aversiveness in part by bringing about, even within the radius of several feet, this absolute split between one's sense of one's own reality and the reality of other persons" (4–5). If one's lived experiences of one's own pain are as radically "unsharable" as her account claims, however, any attempt to generalize from these experiences must be futile. How is she to demonstrate that the "sense of one's own reality" she posits exists as part of any bodily subjectivity but her own? What basis has she for claiming that her theorization of pain applies to anything beyond the impermeable subjective boundaries surrounding the pain of Elaine Scarry? If the "reality of lived bodies" cannot be communicated, then body theorists must, like Descartes, abandon the body as a source of generalizable knowledge.

On the other hand, theories based on the assumption that certain portions of subjective bodily experience *can* be shared open themselves to charges of over-generalization. The identity politics of second-wave feminism, for example, strike critics such as Teresa de Lauretis as being "stalemated once again in the paradox of woman" (41). Since no one formulation of 'female' bodily experience (e.g., a body capable of bearing and nurturing children, or a body vulnerable to rape) can successfully incorporate the experiences of *all* 'female' bodies (e.g., lesbian, disabled, labouring-class, Indo-Canadian, elderly, etc.), the very attempt to analyze subjective female embodiment has been stigmatized as "irksome and ideologically inadequate" (Haag 24). By abandoning subjective embodiment as an area of study, by focusing on the body's representations rather than its experiences, academics can establish themselves, with Descartes, on less perilous critical ground.

These three models of body – the body as wholly object, the body as imperceptible, and the body as the source of radically idiosyncratic (and, therefore, academically useless) data – share more than an underlying somatophobia. In all three cases, I would argue that the issue fueling this somatophobia is a concern about the body's potential for agency. The possibility that the body might *do* as well as *be*, that it might act as well as experience, seems to trouble all three models. Mauss, for example, betrays unease when he attempts to account for the body's role in subjective life. Though he initially categorizes the body as wholly object, part of a well-defined tripartite system in which "the biological and the sociological" are linked by a "psychological mediator" (73), this system appears to break down when he proceeds to actual cases. The body, he observes, appears to 'know' practices which he defines as cultural, *without* the mediation of either psychological or social forces. Commenting, for example, on gender differences in "the different attitudes of the moving body with respect to moving objects," he is unable to account for the fact that these differences exist among both primates (assumed, in that pre-Goodall era, to have no social structures capable of cultural transmission, and no 'mind' in a psychological sense) and humans (76). His attempt at an explanation has a tone of bafflement and sidesteps the issue of primate body techniques entirely:

> Perhaps this is a case of two instructions. For there is a society of men and a society of women. However, I believe that there are also perhaps biological and psychological things involved as well. But there again, the psychologist alone will only be able to give dubious explanations and he will need the collaboration of two neighboring sciences: physiology, sociology. (77)

Similarly, remarking on certain African infant-carrying practices, he notes that the body appears to *produce* psychological forces, as well as respond to them:

> [a] child carried next to its mother's skin for two or three years has a quite different attitude to its mother from that of a child not so carried . . . . It even

> seems that psychical states arise here which have disappeared from infancy with us (79).

By the article's close, he essentially reverses himself on the body's status as wholly object. Instead, the body appears as one actor in a dynamic system of interlocking elements:

> What emerges very clearly . . . is the fact that we are everywhere faced with physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of action. . . . A Comtian would say that there is no gap between the social and the biological. What I can tell you is that here I see psychological facts as connecting cogs and not as causes, except in moments of creation or reform. (85)

The critical tangle evident in Mauss's account of the body's role in culture typifies a body theory in which academic analysis and subjective experience fail to inform each other.

Descartes's writings on the body also display a concern over its capacity for agency. He outlines two registers for the perception of "corporeal things": ideas and judgments based on external or internal sensations, such as "red," "small" or "hungry"; and the results of a reasoned analysis of these ideas (e.g., the tower which appears small at a distance is not truly so). According to his account, the first register is produced by "the union and apparent fusion of the mind with the body" (77) and the second, by the mind alone.[11] The first register, he argues, is inherently unreliable, as demonstrated by illusory experiences such as dreams or phantom limb pain. This determination, however, seems to rely on more than a relative ranking of reliability. The body, in his depiction, is able to *thrust* untrustworthy ideas into the mind, evading the conscious work of reason. Sensory experience itself is not voluntary: "these ideas [i.e., sensory knowledge of things] occurred without the necessity of my consent, so that I could not perceive any object, however much I wished, unless it was present to one of my sense organs; nor was it in my power not to perceive it when it was present" (71). The "being composed of mind and body" is equally imperious – Descartes declared that its "judgments" habitually "took form in my mind before I had the opportunity to weigh any reasons which could oblige me to make them" (72). The rule of reason, in his account, is never uncontested; the mind must hold its ground against bodily insurrections.

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[11] This formulation is, as Patricia Churchland points out, somewhat more complex than the strict binary opposition usually denoted by the term "Cartesian dualism" (8–9).

If the persistent polarization in body theory is a side effect of an underlying somatophobia, then this is one more reason to consider deploying mutual ontogenic structural coupling as a model. This model, with its emphasis on communication and function, can accommodate the agential body as an object of study rather than a threat. When a frustrated academic complains that the body is "dissolv[ing] into language. The body that eats, that works, that dies, that is afraid – that body just isn't there" (qtd. Bynum 1), her appeal is for a recognition of the multiplicity of lived experiences of body, and their ample range. Pain, disability, or disorders such as anorexia, do not offer such recognition, nor are they representative instances of the experience of embodiment in that they emphasize *conflict* between self-perceiving consciousness and the body's agency.[12]

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[12] I rely here on recent empirical research on anorexia nervosa (AN). Epidemiological studies, for example, indicate that AN appears in a predictable percentage of world populations – a strong indication that organic factors, rather than cultural pressures, trigger the disease (Keel and Klump 747). Further, ground-breaking comparative studies of women living in Iran and immigrant Iranian women living in Los Angeles strongly disprove claims linking AN with media representation of women; women living in Iran are just as likely to suffer from AN as their counterparts living in image-saturated America (Abdollahi and Mann 259, Nobakht

Maturana's model, which grows out of and acknowledges neurophysiology's agential body, depicts such conflict as neither normal nor typical (Winograd and Flores 47). Without biology, physiology, and the many sciences interrelated with them, there may be kinds of bodies we cannot acknowledge within body theory. In particular, the agential body may well remain an unarticulated threat rather than a fruitful object of literary-critical study.

Empiricism is by no means the only field body theory can look to in order to recover aspects of bodily experience's multiplicity. If I were to suggest other places where body theory could look to engage subjective embodiment as a cultural object and consensual domain, empirical science is only one option. Simon Shepherd's article "'The body,' performance studies, Horner and a dinner party" (2000), for example, contains an admirable analysis of the actor's body as a mutual ontogenic structural coupling, linking audience and playwright. By examining theories of acting in the eighteenth century, Shepherd demonstrates how the actor's subjective experience of portraying emotion with his or her body was an essential part of performance (288–90). This article locates itself within "drama study" (285), but any field in which intense bodily mindfulness is a point of practice will have a literature in which this subjective bodily practice meets text. Professional food tasters, for example, have an elaborate vocabulary ("super taster," "creaminess perception") which accommodates not only individual experiences of taste,

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and Dezhkam 265). The current epidemiology of AN in North America – the AN "boom" which Susan Bordo deplores in *Unbearable Weight* – has, medical researchers argue, been over-determined by the effects of cultural forces upon diagnosis: an almost perfect case of the name creating the thing. The 'epidemic' of AN which Bordo attributes to cultural pressure seems to consist of a sudden burgeoning of medical attention, rather than a sudden change in female behavior (Miller and Pumariega 93–6). In this sense, AN is as much a creation of medical culture as hysteria was in the nineteenth century.

but a carefully honed palette of categories for marketable public taste (Donaldson-Evans)[13]. I could also mention Buddhist visualization exercises, some of which include the production of empirically measurable bodily changes (Goleman 11–17).[14] The technical language of western classical music frequently refers to both emotion and physicality, with terms like *andante* (walking), *cantabile* (singing), or *appoggiatura* (leaning), suggesting specific bodily involvement rather than ineffability in musical performance.[15] There is room in body theory for analyses of where the subjective experience of body actually sits in any of these fields and in the literary texts which depict them.[16]

I would like to say a final word on this dissertation's research methods. My emphasis on multiplicity and variety of embodiment has meant that psychoanalytic criticism does not figure in my research. As Toni Bowers neatly points out, in any investigation of the body which involves motherhood, "the virtual absence of psychoanalytic methods and assumptions may constitute a silence that some readers find resounding" (23). I do find, however, that the antagonism that contemporary psychoanalytic critics maintain against biological discourse, though not unanimous, is consistent enough to prevent their inclusion in my own work. Psychoanalytic criticism has for many years stood guard against radically determinist concepts of the subject – in particular, against eugenics and other determinist theories of heredity (Foucault 61). Elizabeth Grosz, for example, sees one of the primary goals of psychoanalytic theory as "provid[ing] a challenge to the domination of biology in discourses of the body" ("Psychoanalysis" 271).

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[13] University of Alberta's Department of Agricultural, Food and Nutritional Science offers a basic taster-training course (NU FS 430: Principles of Sensory Evaluation of Food).

[14] More information on empirical studies of the body in meditative state(s) can be found on the websites of the Wiseman Laboratory for Brain Imaging and Behavior, University of Wisconsin (http://brainimaging.wiseman.wisc.edu), and the Lab for Affective Neuroscience, University of Wisconsin-Madison (http://psyphz.psych.wisc.edu).

[15] The deeply ingrained Romantic aesthetic of the "ineffable" in music is well-represented by Vladimir Jankélévitch's 1961 *Music and the Ineffable* (Trans. Carolyn Abbate, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003). For an overview of how the body sciences are challenging this paradigm, see Sebastian Kokelaar and Matthew Lavy's "Explaining the ineffable" (*Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 6.8 (Aug. 2002): 328–9).

[16] Margaret Atwood's *Edible Woman*, for example, includes food tasters, both professional and amateur.

These challenges, however, sometimes take forms that can tend to exclude empiricism absolutely. One is struck, in reading over psychoanalytic formulations of embodiment, with how often these appeal to basic assumptions which contemporary cognitive science explicitly contradicts. Kristeva's theory of maternal abjection, for example, relies on an assumption that bodily self-awareness is not present during early infancy (Kristeva 9–11). Recent infant studies, however, suggest the contrary. Infants less than an hour old can imitate the facial gestures of others, and "monitor, correct, and improve" these imitations. This strongly suggests that "the infant has both a primitive body schema (a system that works automatically to make possible the co-ordination of posture and movement) and a primitive body image" (Gallagher and Metzoff).[17] Similarly, Lacan's account of the "mirror stage" of human development points to the phenomenon of phantom limb pain (aphaeresis) as supporting evidence for its theory of the development of bodily self-awareness (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 62–70). Neurological research, however, has uncovered several cases of aphaeresis in individuals *born* limbless

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[17] Certain animals, such as ravens, also seem to be able to manipulate a cognitive body image (Churchland 86–7).

(Kinsbourne 216). These, along with studies demonstrating the over-riding role of immediate visual perception in phantom limb syndrome (e.g., those proving that manipulation of visual stimuli can produce the 'amputation' of an already non-existent limb), strongly suggests that Lacan's interpretation of the syndrome has mistaken effects for causes (Ramachandran and Rogers-Ramachandran 319).[18]

This is not to suggest that science has 'disproved' the master narratives of psychoanalysis, any more than it has 'proved' or 'disproved' those of (for example) Christianity. But if one wishes to include empiricism within studies of the multiplicity of lived experience, it is difficult to include also a critical discourse which sometimes treats empiricism as though it were irrelevant. As contemporary neuroscience continues, however, the "breathtaking" rate of discovery it has enjoyed for the last thirty years (Churchland 2), psychoanalytic body theorists may very well find ways to establish shared domains with empirical science. Psychoanalysis has its earliest roots in medical empiricism – Freud began his work as a neurological anatomist. The relationship between theory and evidence is, as Mary Poovey points out, a "recursive structure" (430), and a healthy critical practice will find ways to exploit this potentially productive exchange.

One research method which I have chosen to use also requires some explanation. Chapter 1 initiates my argument with a thematic study of how feelings were represented in mid-to-late-eighteenth-century sentimental, medical, and pornographic discourse. Thematic studies have some well-acknowledged weak points, including a tendency to: submerge the specific in an illusory general; ignore or obliterate context; and produce irrelevant, unprofitable conclusions. I have therefore tried, in Chapters 2 and 3, to apply the results of this thematic study to a traditional close reading, and to a Foucauldian textual analysis. These chapters provide a heightened attention to issues involving the lived experiences of women, historical and cultural situatedness, and existing critical debates concerning readings of my target texts (e.g., the problematic narrative structure of Edgeworth's *Belinda*).

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[18] To be fair, Lacan shifted his concept of the mirror stage over time, focusing more on its symbolic value and less on its existence as a historical moment in the life of an infant.

Thematic studies, in spite of their dangers, have also this virtue, that they discourage the production of antithetical binaries. However one may bore and disgust one's colleagues with a thematic account of fish in Shakespeare, it is unlikely that one will simultaneously commit the additional crime of defining one fish as simply *not* another ("tuna / non-tuna") – the lens of thematic analysis lets its user see only continuity. Viewing my material through this lens substantially enhanced my ability to locate consensual domains, as opposed to polarities, among the texts I studied. My research target was not the breast in an absolute sense, but as a site of a co-created reality of bodily experience. The breast, during this period, was a mutual ontogenic structural coupling, through which subjective embodiment was communicated and negotiated. The breast itself, therefore, sometimes drops out of the arc of my argument, as I attempt to make the case for a certain kind of lived body in the late eighteenth century. The experience, and not the object, constitutes my research focus.

The decision to begin with a thematic approach was reinforced by the existence of what I find a surprising number of binary eighteenth-century breasts in existing scholarship. I am certainly not the first to undertake a thematic study of the eighteenth-century breast, *per se*. Major research on this topic to date, however, seems to come, like breasts themselves, in pairs. Ruth Perry's analysis of English colonialism and maternal nursing proposes mutually exclusive maternal and erotic breasts (112). Sue Wiseman identifies the role of breastfeeding in redefining the image of English politics by means of what she differentiates as a "luxurious" breast and a "virtuous" breast (477). Mary Jacobus's study of depictions of breasts during the French revolutionary period similarly opposes a "revolutionary" breast and an aristocratic breast (54–6). Marilyn Yalom's *History of the Breast* is structured throughout with paired sets of "good" and "bad" breasts.[19] The insistent appearance of these cleavage planes echoes the polarizations of body theory, and while I am indebted to these authors and more for their thematic work on the breast in the eighteenth century, my own formulation will not make extensive use of their existing taxonomies. The binary opposites which structure this previous work suggest, in Butler's words, "a field of disruptive possibilities" that has yet to be fully explored ("Bodies that matter" 149). I hope that I have done some small part of this exploration with this dissertation.

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[19] Yalom's "good breast" / "bad breast" paradigm, which she claims has existed "since the beginning of recorded time," is more indebted to the object relations theory of Melanie Klein than to any other source (Yalom 155). In Klein's work, "good breast" refers to an infant's recognition that its source of nourishment is external to itself: a "primal object" (Klien 3). When the infant is deprived of "the milk, love, and care associated with the good breast," this object becomes a "bad breast . . . because it keeps all to itself" (11). This theory of objects does not insist on a literal breast; it explicitly includes, in fact, the breast's "symbolic representative, the bottle" (3). Yalom's use of these terms to describe (all) historical breasts, therefore, literalizes Klein's terms almost to the point of catachresis.

## Body and subjectivity in late-eighteenth-century England:

## Recovering "how it felt"

Constructing a "body-first" reading of late-eighteenth-century breasted experience requires the critic to ask, not "what did she think of it?" or "how did she understand it?" but, instead, "what did it feel like to her?" This is a formulation that can successfully inject the lived body into the literary-critical process, but not without activating an array of related problems: does the subjective experience of existing as a body ever truly intersect with consciousness? is any part of this experience, conscious or otherwise, communicable to others? and, if it is, can language really function as part of this communication? This is a set of difficulties that need to be addressed before this analysis can carry on to ask the more specific questions about late-eighteenth-century breasted experience, and the project may fail abruptly on any (or all) of these grounds. Perhaps the question "what did it feel like to her?" is only fit to be lumped in with similar queries – such as "what is like to be a lizard?" or "how does it feel to be dead?" – as material for the imagination, not for academic research. I would argue, however, that questions of lived bodily experience should be pursued to the point of impossibility (wherever that point may, eventually, turn out to be), because to abandon such inquiries is to surrender to essentialist categories of physical difference. *If no-one can really know* "what it's like to be" – a woman, a child, a lesbian, an animal, an addict, a person of colour, a person with a disability – except those who occupy, at that given moment, that particular subject position, then all of these bodies fall silent. To be both defined by one's body and deemed unable to speak it is oppression indeed.

This chapter's thematic study of subjective bodily experience in the late eighteenth century will begin with the assumption that "how it feels" is a cultural object, susceptible to academic study. As a result, my study will not be a search for the late eighteenth century's "embodied subject" – as though it were possible to be a subject without a body, or as though the state of embodiment were necessarily independent from subjectivity. Though the term "embodied subject" seems to be reasonably well-accepted among current scholars,[1] an incautious application of this category to the discourses of the late eighteenth century may obliterate the very differences I seek to unearth. Rather, this chapter will treat both embodiment and subjectivity as terms in motion, whose boundaries must be emergent from study, not pre-defined.

If one considers "how it feels" as a situated cultural object, then it becomes possible to make a case arguing that the modern concepts of bodily "feeling" identified in this dissertation's introduction – "feeling" as primarily mental, as signifying abnormal function, as radically incommunicable – may differ substantially from the ideas of late-eighteenth-century England. If "how it feels" is a historically, culturally, and politically specific term – situated as the terms "woman" or "empire" are situated – then perhaps it can speak itself just as articulately within body theory as "woman" and "nation" speak in feminism and post-colonialism, respectively. Academics in these fields have explicated and expanded these once-universal categories, adding nuance and complexity to how we read the literatures which employ them. The following analysis will assume that "feeling" *is* so situated, so located – if only because the literature of the late eighteenth century provides such a fertile field for applying such a hypothesis to specific texts and authors. In particular, the literature of sentiment, as one of the primary arenas within which the late eighteenth century discussed the meaning and nature of "how it feels," offers rich opportunities for testing the idea that bodily experience of the self is context-particular, rather than absolute. While early critical studies of what was then called 'the cult of sentiment' maintained a relatively narrow focus on the role of affectivity within a particular mode of literature, more recent scholarship has expanded its view to include both a wider variety of texts (e.g., medical writing, abolition rhetoric), and a wider recognition of the role of sentiment in late-eighteenth-century life in general (Barker-Benfield xxxiv). This willingness among historians and critics to embrace "a history of the late eighteenth century that regards sensibility as the animating force for the whole period" (Jones 395) permits a far more flexible reading of "how it felt" during this time – one that can, hopefully, offer free play to the hypothesis that "feeling" is as sensitive to its environment as "gender" is, or "nationality."

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[1] Some examples, taken at random, occur in the work of Valerie Vasterling ("the finiteness of the speaking embodied subject" (206)) and Gunn Engelsrud ("an open and critical attitude in terms of the self and the other as embodied subjects" (267)).

The following thematic analysis will therefore anchor itself in the literature of sentiment, while reading around and across the discourse of "feeling" in a wide variety of related texts from other genres and disciplines. Three main concepts will emerge from this reading: that late-eighteenth-century concepts of "how it feels" included a central and active (though widely debated) role for the body; that the discourse of this period easily accommodated the idea that this kind of "feeling" could be shared and communicated across bodies; and that this sharing and communication between bodies could occur in a full and legitimate form through the mediation of various kinds of representation, including text. In Chapters 2 and 3, these three concepts will form the basis for close readings focused on the role of bodily experience in representations of breastedness.

**"Feeling" as a body function: Sensibility and the nervous system**

The literature of sentiment routinely depicts a robust interrelationship between embodiment and "feeling," and this interrelationship has its foundations in mid-to-late-eighteenth-century science.[2] The twentieth century's search for the neural counterparts of consciousness (NCCs) has an almost exact parallel in eighteenth-century medical research, as anatomists and other natural philosophers sought to understand what role the brain and nervous system play in subjective life. This topic was of more than casual interest for Enlightenment researchers. As science historian Karl Figlio points out, the study of neurophysiology, with its promise of insight into concepts such as "mind" and "soul," dominated eighteenth-century physiology throughout the century (178). English physician James Johnstone, for example, summarized the state of neurophysiology in 1795 in the following terms:

> What we know only with certainty is this single fact; that the nerves connect the soul and the body together: that by them the soul acts, and is acted upon: how these things are performed is entirely unknown to us, and will probably so remain, at least, till new discoveries are made in the nervous system. (52)

The sooner these discoveries can be made, Johnstone seems to imply, the better.

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[2] For an overview of the relationships between contemporary science and the literature of sentiment, see R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress* (London: Macmillan P, 1974), pp. 16–55, and G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992), pp. 1–36.

Early-eighteenth-century models of nerve function emphasize the role of bodily functions in producing feelings, relegating mental processes to a less central role in lived experience. Neural anatomist Thomas Willis produced one of the first and most influential models of nerve function, which exerted a strong influence upon later English neurophysiologists. He proposed that nerves, like blood vessels, were hollow fibres conducting a subtle fluid ("animal spirits") throughout the body. These fluids, full of dynamic corpuscles,

> being left to themselves, . . . are pleasingly or quietly expatiated; but in the mean time, as occasion is offered, the same Spirits . . . conceive other spreadings abroad, and those more rapid. For as in a River, from winds or any thing cast in, divers undulations or wavings are stirred up; so the animal Spirits being raised up by objects for the performing the offices of sense and motion, do tend this way or that way to and fro within the nervous stock, and are agitated hither and thither by other means. (*Five Treatises* 128)

These motions of the animal spirits within the body, according to Willis, accounted for all internal responses to the external environment; "sensations" (experiences provided by the five senses), "passions" (emotional experiences), and "affections" (instantaneous, unreasoned moral reactions) were all explicable as specific physiological processes involving the nerves (Willis, *Two Discourses* 95–7).[3] This highly influential representation of neural anatomy thus suggested that "feeling," in all of its three forms, was a direct physiological response to environmental stimuli, rather than a product of mental activity: "[t]he external world was processed through humanity, not initially through intellectual effort but through sensation and feeling" (Todd 23). Famously systematized by Locke in his *Essay on Humane Understanding*, the eighteenth century's first essays into understanding "feeling" founded themselves on the body's primacy.[4]

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[3] Newton proposed a different model, in which the nerves were solid rather than hollow, and functioned by transmitting tiny oscillations. The hollow-nerve theory and the solid-nerve theory were both influential throughout the eighteenth century (Barker-Benfield 4–5).

These neural models of feeling were influential beyond the study of natural philosophy or medicine. According to critic Ann Jessie Van Sant, the discourse of neurophysiology provided new ways for literary writers, as well as scientists, to discuss and express the nature of subjectivity: "seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scientific knowledge of circulation and neural processes made internal function increasingly vivid and therefore increasingly available as a literal and metaphorical means of describing interior experience" (12). As a result, the view that "how it feels" is primarily a neurophysiological phenomenon proliferated rapidly and thoroughly in the literature of the early eighteenth century. Samuel Garth's *The Dispensary* (1715), for example, celebrates the medical skill which could investigate

> Whence, their Mechanick Pow'rs, the Spirits claim,
> How great their Force, how delicate their Frame:
> How the same Nerves are fashion'd to sustain
> The greatest Pleasure and the greatest Pain. (I:36–9)

Similarly, James Thomson's wildly successful georgic poem *The Seasons* (1726–30) is replete with neurophysiological descriptions of intense feeling ("His once so vivid nerves, / So full of buoyant soul" (ll. 451–2)).[5] Most importantly, the emergence of the popular novel in the 1740s coincided with "the great heyday for literature of all types concerning the nerves" (qtd. Barker-Benfield 6).

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[4] For statements by Locke on the founding role physical sensory perception plays in 'mental' life, see the *Essay*, pp. 5161.

Richardson, in particular, played an important role in physicalizing feeling, using the bodies of his novels' heroines. As Barker-Benfield notes, Richardson had ready access to the neurophysiological theories of his time through correspondence with his personal doctor, George Cheyne, who treated him for various 'nervous' disorders (7–8). Richardson's widely read texts highlighted the importance of the "affections," in particular, as products of nervous sensibility. In *Clarissa*, for example, Richardson depicts the instant revulsion his heroine feels for Solmes, her least welcome suitor, as a significant moral response, not a spurious prejudice. She can, eventually, provide rational arguments for refusing to marry him (for example, the unjustness of his proposed marriage settlements (105–6)), but these follow her initial, unreasoned reaction: "this one man," she declares, ". . . my heart, unbidden, resists" (91). The conflict between Clarissa and her family is, at least in part, a battle over whether her knowledge, based on an affective response, will be allowed equal footing with knowledge based on the slow calculation of easily quantified items, such as degree of relation, contiguity of lands, and pounds per year. Richardson comes down unambiguously on the side of affection. He portrays the family's conviction that Clarissa's "aversion to Solmes is an aversion that may be easily surmounted, and *ought* to be surmounted in duty to [her] father, and for the promotion of family views" (136) as radically mistaken, and paints the family's eventual "concert of grief" (1395) as the natural outcome of "a conduct so perverse and unnatural"

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[5] Interestingly, these particular lines refer to animal subjectivity (a hunted stag).

(1397). The knowledge gained through nervous sensibility should be respected, not "surmounted."

The conflict between Clarissa and Lovelace is, similarly, a contest between the relative powers of physical sensibility and mental calculation in judging and guiding human behavior. Lovelace's nervous system is, apparently, sufficiently developed to supply him with the perceptions and reactions that might guide him to a better life; Clarissa herself is impressed by his innate capacities in this regard, but deplores the results of a lifetime spent surmounting sensibility in favour of mere intellect:

> What sensibilities, said the divine creature, withdrawing her hand, must thou have suppressed! What a dreadful, what a judicial hardness of heart must thine be! who canst be capable of such emotions, as sometimes thou hast shown; and of such sentiments, as sometimes have flowed from thy lips; yet canst have so far overcome them all as to be able to act as thou hast acted, and that from settled purpose and premeditation; and this, as it is said, throughout the whole of thy life, from infancy to this time! (852)

In battles of pure cognition, Clarissa is often bested. Lovelace's contrivances successfully trick her out of her father's house and into a brothel, out of the relative safety of a hired lodging and into the scene of her own rape. Clarissa herself, as the novel progresses, admits herself "over-reached" (852). Her sensibility, however, is rarely misled; her affections detect Lovelace's duplicity in proposing a meeting ("my heart misgives me, as to meeting him; and that more and more, I know not why" (266)), predict the results of her flight ("My heart strongly gives me, that once I am compelled to leave this house, I never shall see it more" (252)), and unmask the false noblewomen set to trap her ("My heart misgave me beyond the power of my own accounting for it; for still I did not suspect these women" (1007)). Lovelace is forced to shift his ground, replacing the contest of sensibility versus intellect with a struggle of bodies. Even on these bodily grounds, however, sensibility triumphs; Lovelace dominates Clarissa physically during the rape, but her body responds by refusing to accept food, eventually placing her beyond her persecutor's reach forever. Clarissa does not consciously choose this resolution to her situation, nor does she have a clear mental understanding of how or why her body, with its intricate nervous system, is taking slow starvation as its course: "What, sir, said she, can I do? I have no appetite. Nothing you call nourishing will stay on my stomach. I do what I can . . ." (1129). As a rational being, all she can do is report the knowledge her nervous sensibility gives her, quietly foretelling her own death ("now, if I can judge by what I feel in myself, putting her hand to her heart, I cannot continue long" (1276)). Her "extreme sensibility" (944) is the primary actor in the last days of Clarissa's life, its decisions dominating even her intellectual determination not to hasten her own death (1117–8).

Given these aspects of the novel, one is rather surprised to find a prominent literary critic like R. F. Brissenden, for example, concluding that "[t]he world of *Clarissa* is . . . very much a mental world" (162). Brissenden is certainly aware that eighteenth-century psychology founded its concepts in "individual human experience" (22); he is also familiar with the contemporary discourse that located the source of this "experience" firmly in the body (16–7, 30–1). Yet, in calling *Clarissa* "the first great psychological novel" (162), he tacitly invokes modern psychology, which tends to privilege the mental:

> The other [thread] is her sentimentality – almost in the modern sense of the word: her wish to believe the best rather than the worst of people . . . . Clarissa just cannot imagine the depths of cruelty to which her family . . . can descend; and she has no conception of the sophisticated, premeditated, self-delighting villainy in which Lovelace indulges. (167–8)

In this representation, Clarissa's sensibility[6] is anything but physical in nature: it is a "wish," a "belie[f]," a capacity to "imagine" or form "conception[s]." The power of sensibility shrinks pathetically as Brissenden relocates it from Clarissa's body to her 'mind,' and she becomes a feeble figure: a doomed naïf, an "idealist" whose encounter with "reality" literally drives her, in his rather unsympathetic words, "into fits" (175–6).

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[6] Here, the oft-noted linguistic difficulties involved in the discussion of sentimental literature (Barker-Benfield xvii, Ellis 7–8, More, "Sensibility" 282) rear their ugly heads. In the quotation immediately preceding, Brissenden does use the term "sentimentality"; however, I am not engaging in straw-man tactics by taking him to task on issues of "sensibility" (in its generally accepted contemporary meaning of "receptivity of the senses" (Barker-Benfield 17)), instead. He clearly does not mean "sentiment" in the sense in which (as he himself acknowledges earlier) Richardson and his contemporaries use the term, *viz.*, "[t]hought; notion; opinion" (Johnson's *Dictionary*). Rather, Brissenden uses "sentimentality" in this context to mean "affectation of sensibility, exaggerated insistence upon the claims of sentiment" (*OED*), and the fact that he focuses on this "affectation of sensibility," rather than the active, effective sensibility depicted in Richardson's text, is exactly the point at issue. The appearance of a bait-and-switch in this portion of my argument is thus an unfortunate side-effect of an effort to maintain some sort of terminological consistency in my own writing, while dealing with texts in which similar or even identical concepts can be addressed under a variety of names. For more information on flexibility of terminology in contemporary discourses of sensibility/sentiment, see G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, pp. xv–xviii, and Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*, pp. 7–8.

My point here is not so much to accuse him of a misreading – though I do think he has misread Richardson in this particular – as to give one example of the problems which may occur if one treats "feeling" as a universal, trans-historical 'given.' Brissenden does not incorporate into his reading the possibility that, to Richardson and his contemporary readers, a bodily feeling and a moral judgment could be one and the same. By claiming that Clarissa's moral struggles take place in "a mental world," Brissenden dehistoricizes an important facet of her character, in a manner that has far-reaching effects on his assessments of the novel as a whole. By enforcing continuity between modern ideas of "how it feels" and those present in Richardson, Brissenden inadvertently strips *Clarissa* of its historical particularity in this regard.

Admittedly, representations of bodily subjectivity in the literature of sentiment can be slippery to deal with. The language Richardson uses to describe nervous sensibility is, to be fair, somewhat confusing. He does not employ Willis's terminology; an "affection," for Willis, is an instantaneous, unreasoned moral reaction, while in *Clarissa*, it is something one invokes when subscribing a letter. "Heart" seems to be the word Richardson associates most frequently with unreasoned moral reaction, but this term does not define consistent boundaries. In certain instances, the "heart" seems capable of sustained thought as well as instantaneous judgment (e.g., "reasonings in your heart about him" (174)), and in others, is the seat of passion as well as affection (e.g., "*my* [sic] heart flames out with a violent passion for her" (1144)). In one case, the text explicitly equates "heart" with "conscience," opening up the interesting possibility that nervous sensibility not only provides moral information, but is *itself* the moral sense (362). In spite of this possibility, however, the "heart" obstinately remains a body part throughout the novel. On her deathbed, for example, Clarissa describes Lovelace's persecutions as having "given me a pain just here – putting her hand to her heart" (1272): is this a moral pain or a bodily one? or both? When Lovelace, in his madness, demands that Clarissa's physical heart be brought to him in place of the heart whose love he could not win, the slippage of his ideas is perhaps understandable (1384). When one examines *Clarissa* for details of *exactly* how the body's nervous system is implicated in subjective experience, the text's language becomes unmanageable.

This unmanageability is not restricted to Richardson's novels; it characterizes mid-to-late-eighteenth-century literature's treatment of the body's role in "how it feels." The literature of sentiment presents no clear picture of exactly how 'body' interacts with 'self' during the sentimental moment. A phrase such as "every beat of my heart awakes a virtue!" (93) in Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, for example, suggests that "feeling" is an experience in which affect, cognition, and physical sensation are all full participants: the emotion of viewing a good man's grave is a physical sensation, which creates a cognitive result ("awakes a virtue"). The very simultaneity of these experiences, however, confuses any attempt to differentiate their origins and functions. Does the visual perception of the gravestone have a direct effect on the contractions of the heart? or is the emotional experience of pity inseparable from a certain kind of heart function, both of which are produced by visual perception of the grave? or does the nervous system leap directly from the visual stimulus to the virtue, with emotion and increased heart rate as side-effects?

Attempts at this kind of analysis may seem laughably literal, but sentimental writers themselves seem addicted to performing them, tracing out distinctions and mechanisms of feeling that often make direct reference to medical discourse. Lawrence Sterne is perhaps the most subtle compounder of these, delivering such dicta as: "there is a sort of . . . blush, where the blood is more in fault than the man – 'tis sent impetuous from the heart, and virtue flies after it" (116), or making specific reference to contemporary neurophysiology: "all comes from thee, great, great SENSORIUM of the world! which vibrates, if a hair of our heads but falls upon the ground" (141).[7] Yet this ostensible accuracy of description and terminology in Sterne's writing co-exists with a conspicuous use of *occupatio* (a rhetorical claim of inarticulateness, e.g., "But I'll not describe it" (116)), a peculiarity it shares with other sentimental texts.[8] Though the literature of sentiment *seems* to say a great deal about the bodily nature of subjective experience, sentimental texts avoid clear explanations, explicitly silencing themselves when subjective experience is at its most obvious and intense.[9]

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[7] "Sensorium" (sometimes translated from the Latin as "Sensory") is the term used in early neurophysiology to denote the seat of sensation, generally agreed to reside within the brain; see, for example, Chapter IV of Willis's *Two Discourses*: "that common Sensory, that receives and distinguishes the Species, and all Impressions . . . and represents them to the Imagination there presiding" (27). For more information on this concept's impact on eighteenth-century thought, see Karl M. Figlio, "Theories of perception and the physiology of mind in the late eighteenth century" (*Hist. Sci.* xii (1975), 177–212).

[8] Examples of sentimental texts employing *occupatio* include: Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* ("What he felt during that Interval, is not to be expressed" (18)); Richardson's *Pamela* ("What shall I say, since Words are too faint to express my gratitude and my joy?" (386)); Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* ("It would be endless to describe the different sensations" (16)); and Burney's *Evelina* ("The various feelings which oppress me, I have not language to describe" (177)).

[9] Janet Todd is, of course, correct in pointing out that the object of sentimental literature is primarily to provoke, not to depict or to explain, the sentimental moment: "[i]n all forms of sentimental literature, there

If the literature of sentiment fails to depict coherently how feeling actually functions in relation to the body, it nonetheless demonstrates a marked interest in the existence of such a relation. The literature of sentiment and the science of feeling were, in the mid- to late eighteenth century, co-participants in constructing a space wherein "how it feels" could be recognized and imagined as a body process. Both discourses pursue the role of the body in subjectivity, with an intensity (and variety) which testifies to its significance. A focus on the body is not only characteristic of eighteenth-century "feeling" but central to it. Embodiment and subjectivity, during this period, were inseparable concepts – contested, confused, or even self-suppressed, they were nonetheless impossible to isolate from one another.

## "Feeling" as a social state: Sympathy and the sentimental novel

The persistent vagueness which characterizes the literature of sentiment's representations of the body's role in "how it feels" reflects a similar lack of coherence in the medical and scientific ideas upon which it draws. A change in both the methods and objects of study in neurophysiology occurred at mid-century, emphasizing the functions rather than the structures of the nervous system; it continued exerting its influence throughout the remainder of the 1700s and into the early 1800s. This relatively short-lived movement, a reaction against the mechanical science of Newton and Boyle,

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is an assumption that life and literature are directly linked, not through any notion of a mimetic depiction of reality but through the belief that the literary experience can intimately affect the living one. . . . Sentimental literature is exemplary of emotion, teaching its consumers to produce a response equivalent to the one presented in its episodes" (4). Granting this, however, it becomes still more remarkable that sentimental texts should so frequently invoke the language and ideas of contemporary neurophysiology, whose associations (e.g., animal vivisection, the dissection of cadavers) are anything but sentimental.

provided a window for ideas of embodiment and subjectivity which were highly marked. Early in the century, natural philosophers had explored the nervous system primarily through dissection, not functional observation. Anatomy, teasing dead nerves into isolation, had discovered only objects, not mechanisms. Anatomists and other researchers were thus forced to be readers, as well as observers; Willis's corpuscles and Newton's vibrations are competing interpretations of a single set of nervous texts, traced in webs throughout the body. This functional vacuum left ample room for speculation and debate, some of which overlapped with highly sensitive issues of religious and philosophical orthodoxy: if all our feelings are located in our nervous systems, does that mean that our minds/souls are, too? does it mean that matter itself can feel or think? and where does human agency fit into the picture? Early researchers, such as Willis, based their work on the idea that body functions were mechanical in nature, like the movements of planets or the properties of liquids, and thus could be reduced into mathematical systems with universal applications. Doubtless, certain phenomena within subjective experience, such as ideas and thoughts, were not completely physical in nature, but these could be traced to physical origins in a coherent chain of action and reaction. As Peter Reill points out, recent depictions of the Enlightenment sometimes imply that mechanistic theories held undisputed sway over the intellectual world of the long eighteenth century ("Vitalizing Nature and Naturalizing" 361–3). As the century progressed, however, natural philosophers increasingly expressed dissatisfaction with the explanations which mechanistic models provided for the functions of living organisms. If the body was a machine, then how did its various parts manage to cooperate with each other? How was it possible for it to reproduce itself? And how did it initiate its own movements (Yolton 43–

7)?[10] Mechanical approaches to the body were thus vulnerable both on doctrinal and logical grounds.

These criticisms (combined with a generational 'changing of the guard' among natural philosophers, and the impact of continental writers such as Buffon) shed doubt on the models and epistemology proposed by Willis, Newton, and other mechanistic researchers. The 1730s and 40s, in particular, witnessed a widespread rejection of mechanistic ideas among physiologists of the brain and nervous system (Brown 179–82). The new neurophysiology substituted experiment for observation, and neurological phenomena for anatomical conjecture, establishing itself on a foundation of "epistemological modesty," rather than comprehensive mathematical certainty (252). Physicians such as Cheyne, who had begun their careers flushed with confidence in the exegetical powers of a mechanically systematized body, exchanged this assurance, in the 1730s, for the greater caution of experimental science (198–9). Cheyne's earliest writings admit little doubt into their declarations: "all *Sensation* is nothing but Touching, several ways diversified. *Generation* is nothing but *Accretion*, for it is beyond all doubt, that all *Generation* is from a preceding little Animal lodged in the Male" (*Philosophical Principles* 387). Thirty years later, his tone is chastened:

> I lay much greater Stress upon the Experience and Observations themselves, than upon any philosophical Reasons I, or any other can suggest; tho', I think, they may not be without their Evidence, when drawn from the real Nature of Things,

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[10] For a detailed summary of the contemporary criticisms leveled against mechanical models of the brain and nervous system, see Peter Hanns Reill, "Vitalizing nature and naturalizing the humanities in the late eighteenth century" (*Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 28 (1999): 261–381), pp. 262–68, and John Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 3–13.

> or from the best Accounts of the *Animal OEconomy* we have hitherto gain'd. (*English Malady* 68)

This is not to say that the revised goals and methods of late-eighteenth-century neurophysiology excluded theoretical speculation about the nature of feeling and consciousness altogether. This speculation, however, began to found itself on the idea that studying the body was not the same as analyzing a mechanism. With pendulums, every action produced an equal and opposite reaction, but with legs, a tiny tap from a hammer produced a dramatic kick. With clockwork, the movement of one wheel was transmitted to another through a series of connecting cogs, while, with bodies, no physical connection seemed (to the anatomy of the time) to exist between the muscles that contract and the nerves that stimulate contraction. Clearly, bodies transmitted and produced their actions (and reactions) using something that inorganic matter didn't have; some force or principle inherent in living matter allowed it to operate under different rules than those governing planets, levers, and billiard balls (Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* 128–9, 135). Further, this force's functions were demonstrably associated with the body's nervous system. In 1794, the then-president of the College of Physicians emphasized the paramount importance of the relationship of the nerves to the "living principle" animating various organisms:

> Every thing [sic] that relates to the nerves [is] closely connected with the operations of the living principle . . . . [T]he nerves . . . are conductors of part of the living principle to all the organs of the body, for the purposes of life, sensation, and action; it is by means of the nerves the living principle is acted upon . . . . (Gardiner 49, 53)

The more one could discover about this force, the better one would understand all phenomena unique to bodily experience – including "how it feels."

Knowledge about subjective feelings was crucial in the theories and debates of this new neurophysiology. Opinions varied as to just what the living principle might be, and how it operated. Some theorists argued that there were two opposing vital forces held in balance within the body; others postulated a single force, but differed as to its physical distribution (Reill, *Vitalizing Nature* 143, 131). Most "vitalist" thinkers agreed, however, that the body's animating principle should not be understood as the governing half of a reconstituted mind/body or soul/body dichotomy. Living matter was feeling matter, and not all parts of the body felt things with equal acuity; some tissues, then, contained more of the living principle than others, and it seemed ridiculous to suggest that certain membranes or organs naturally contain more mind or soul than others, or that "mind" and/or "soul" are qualities somehow divisible within a single body. The living principle was thus an entity distinct from these. The variability of sensation physiologists observed among the body's various tissues further suggested that the body was not a unitary entity, but a complex collection of elements operating together to produce results beyond the capacity of any individual part – the "*Animal OEconomy*" Cheyne mentions in the quotation above. The fact that these elements could, in the absence of disease or malformation, cooperate with each other so harmoniously – regenerating, repairing, regulating growth and action – offered yet more proof that some occult quality of living matter was at work (Brown 211). Neurophysiologists of the time referred to this bodily cooperation (or, as one contemporary medical text words it, "this well known consent of parts" (Kirkland 173)) by the term "sympathy."

"Sympathy," in this highly specialized sense of the term, was a key element in vitalist thought, and in widening the possibilities of "how it feels." I hurt my foot, and a tear instantly springs to my eye; in mechanical terms, how can *both* the foot and the tear duct evince a reaction, simultaneously, to the same action? In the absence of a demonstrable physical link between the two, vitalists attributed this kind of "action at a distance" to the powers of the vital forces, which produce sympathy between the body's various organs:

> Thus formerly, when the nature of sounds was little understood, and a stroke upon a harpsichord was found to produce the same effect on another, if in unison with it, this was called sympathy . . . . [T]he term sympathy may properly be applied . . . when, upon an impression being made, any set of nerves may be put in action, not in consequence of the sensorium itself being affected, but some particular nerves. (Cullen 27)

Sympathy, so defined, provided an explanation for many bodily phenomena which had proved perplexing in mechanical terms, such as reflex motion, or the coordination of systems required for digestion (Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* 135–36, 140). It also enabled neurophysiology to make its first important contributions to the diagnosis and treatment of disease, by suggesting a coherent model of the body's normal function in health. Edinburgh University, for example, one of two main centres of vitalist thought in Europe, took an optimistic tone in its 1791 textbook of anatomy and physiology, suggesting that the body's sympathetic responses could point the way for medical research, even in the absence of an exhaustive knowledge of the body and its functions: "Will not this in some measure account for many salutary operations performed in the body, before experience has taught us the functions of the organs performing them?" (*A System* 285). Despite its acknowledged foundations in conjecture, sympathy was thus an exciting investigative and clinical tool for late-eighteenth-century natural philosophers.[11]

Sympathy soon proved itself useful for understanding more than cooperation and interaction among the body's parts, influencing other fields such as philosophy and literature. Certain European theorists explicitly endorsed the idea that sympathy was a universal phenomenon, linking all life through the activity of hidden forces (Reill, *Vitalizing* 136–7). Hume, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, proposes something similar:

> Now if we survey the universe, so far as it falls under our knowledge, it bears a great resemblance to an animal or organized body, and seems actuated with a like

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[11] Sympathy, in a more general sense, was not a completely new concept in natural philosophy. Seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century medical texts drew on Paracelsian science for a model of sympathy that included a good deal of what modern anthropologists would call "sympathetic magic": "The notablest examples of this *Mundane Sympathy* are in histories more uncertain and obscure, and such as, though I have been very credibly inform'd, yet, as I have already declared my self [sic], I dare only avouch as possible, viz. the Souls of men leaving their Bodies and appearing in shapes . . . and that whatever hurt befalls them in these *Astral* bodies, as the *Paracelsians* love to call them, the same is inflicted upon their *Terrestrial*, . . . . as in women with child, whose Fancies, made keen by a sudden fear, have depriv'd their children of their arms, yes and of their heads too; as also appears by two remarkable stories Sr. *Kenelme Digby* relates in his witty and eloquent *Discourse of the Cure of Wounds, by the powder* [sic] *of Sympathy*" (More, *A Collection* 214). In spite of vigorous protests from the new experimental scientists, this concept of sympathy survived through the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, in forms such as Mesmerism (see, for example, John Bell's English translation of Jean-François Fournel's *Essay on Somnabulism* (Dublin, 1788)).

> principle of life and motion. . . . [T]he closest sympathy is perceived throughout the entire system: and each part or member, in performing its proper offices, operates both to its own preservation and to that of the whole. (115)

The parallel he draws between a healthy body united by the preserving influence of the living principle, and a universe animated and directed by divine immanence, is only one of several attractive analogies the doctrine of sympathy made available to thinkers of the time. A healthy body politic, for example, which maintained both individual liberties and the well-being of larger social units by means of its power, could be depicted as simply a larger-scale version of the human body, which protected the well-being of both the individual "member" and the "system" of which the member formed a part, by means of the living principle. Literature quickly absorbed the concept of sympathy, with its potential for naturalizing a variety of constructed relations by reference to the body's function, into its depictions of sensibility and its effects. The "Ode to Sympathy" was almost as common as the "Ode to Sensibility" in late-eighteenth-century minor poetry, and tended to emphasize sympathy's role in extending nervous sensibility into the realm of social relations:

> Thus Instinct, Sympathy, or what you will,
> A first great principle, is active still; . . .
> Man's favour'd soul then tracing thro' each state,
> Behold it fitted for a social fate;
> Behold how ev'ry link in nature tends
> One chain to form of relatives and friends.

> One chain, unnumber'd beings to confine,
>
> 'Till all assimilate and all combine. (Pratt 15)

Sympathy with the feelings of others is thus the basis of social harmony, just as sympathy within the body is the source of physical harmony.[12]

It is important to note that sympathy's definition as that "by which distant parts [of the body] are brought to consent" (Gardiner 62) opened up the question of just how great a distance sympathy was capable of bridging. Vitalists agreed that the life force could easily respond to stimuli beyond bodily boundaries. The famous Robert Whytt, for example, observed that

> [b]y means of different musical sounds, various passions may be excited or calmed and diseases are said to have been sometimes cured. By doleful stories, or shocking sights, delicate people have been often affected with fainting and general convulsions . . . . (*Observations* 10–11)

If sympathy could link a body with elements of its environment, such as sounds, it seemed reasonable to suggest that it could also link one body with another. Some natural philosophers noted evidence that emotional experiences, and other phenomena associated with the operation of the nerves, did appear to be able transmit themselves, in a completely literal sense, from one body to others:

> The affections of the mind of one person will often work upon the spirits of many. Thus whole companies are sometimes disposed to be sad and melancholy, or

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[12] I am indebted to Isobel Grundy for pointing out that Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* (1733) contains an earlier formulation of similar ideas: "All are but parts of one stupendous Whole, / Whose Body *Nature* is, and *God* the Soul" (16).

> merry and jovial, when any one is present much inclined to either of those states of mind; and it has been observed, that old people, who have loved the company of the young, and have been conversant continually with them, have generally lived long. (Jackson 97–8)[13]

This, after all, would be only one more case of sympathy enabling different organs to cooperate and interact at a distance. It was not necessarily any more difficult to believe that one person's bodily experience of grief could stimulate grief in another's body, than to accept that a puncture wound in a person's foot could lock the muscles of that individual's jaw.

This aspect of sympathy became, in the sentimental novel, an aid to depicting various social relations (as well as a useful plot device); parents recognized long-lost children (Hervey 286), and soulmates discovered instantaneous soulmates (Fielding, *The Cry* 30–1) through this mysterious organic power. Premonitions (Gunning, *Packet* 60–1), insights (*Arpasia* 60), illnesses (Griffith, *A Series* 90), friendships (Charlotte Smith 124), thoughts (Gunning, *Anecdotes* 36–7), and even death (Scott 175) could all be shared, in a perfectly literal sense, by means of sympathy.[14] The body was not a barrier which separated one subjectivity from another, but rather a mutual medium, by means of which any number of intense experiences could be felt by more than one individual at a time. The language of a number of late-eighteenth-century sentimental novels suggests that, by the end of the century, a 'belief' in sympathy's ability to create social emotions and experiences had become (like the "romantic idea" of the impossibility of a "second attachment" which Austen mocks in *Sense and Sensibility* (47–8)) an article of faith in the sentimental creed:

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[13] Jackson's observations, which seem to have passed by his Scottish reviewers without provoking much fuss, were sharply criticized by the *London Medical Journal*; vitalism, though well-accepted in Edinburgh, was not universally established in England. See "A treatise on sympathy, in two parts" (*Medical Commentaries for the Years 1781–2*, 150–61), and *Sympathy Defended* (London, 1784).

[14] For an extensive study of sympathy's role in French sentimental literature (which seems to have absorbed the concept rather earlier than its English counterpart), and its impact on ideas of reader experience, see David Marshall's *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988).

> . . . [E]lse whence that immediate attachment which so often rises from a casual meeting, whilst revolving years witness the unsuccessful and hopeless suit of others? Whence that unerring prescience, that sudden impulse, which informs the soul, as if by inspiration of whatever concerns its kindred object, whether of evil or of good? though mountains rise, and seas roll between them, the sympathetic principle continues to operate in the communication of mutual sensations. (*History of Charles Falkland* 53–4)[15]

Even novelists who do not explicitly endorse sympathy as an essential sentimental doctrine seem intrigued by the possibility that subjectivity could, by its means, communicate itself across bodily boundaries. Two relatively level-headed characters in *Henry Earl of Moreland*, for example, share the following exchange:

> Sir, says he, do you believe that there is such a thing as sympathy? Occasionally, Sir, I think it may have its effect, though I cannot credit all the wonders that are

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[15] For further evidence of sympathy's status as an orthodox sentimental doctrine, see: *The History of Miss Delia Stanhope* (Dublin, 1767), p. 141; Elizabeth Griffith's *The History of Lady Barton* (London, 1771), pp. 238–9; *The Carpenter's Daughter, of Derham-Down* (London, 1791), p. 139; Richard Griffith's *The Triumvirate* (London, 1764), p. 177; and Susannah Gunning's *Memoirs of Mary* (London, 1793), pp. 2–3.

> reported of it. I am sorry for that, said he, as I ardently wish that your feelings were the same as mine at this instant. (Brooke 327)

Late-eighteenth-century sentimental novelists sometimes go so far as to depict the emotional extension available through sympathy as if it could create a joint subjectivity, fully shared across two bodies, "as if one soul had animated both" (Cumberland 125–6). Entire lives, in this case, could be lived as part of the subjective life of those around one. The sentimental hero of *Edington*, for example, has to learn to negotiate an emotional life which is substantially composed of the experiences of another: "[h]e had now very few pleasures, and indeed not many pains, which could properly be called his own; but, through the medium of sympathy, could easily be made to enjoy, or to suffer, all the day long" (Hey 173). If sympathy could create emotional effects at a distance, from one body to another, then subjectivity itself was social, rather than individual.

Literary critics, however, seem to have a difficult time taking this aspect of the sentimental novel at face value. Scholars studying the late eighteenth century's representations of sympathy tend to interpret them as metaphors for intense emotional response on the part of a spectator, rather than literal representations of lived experience at that place and time. Adam Smith's well-known discussion of sympathy in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* offers an example of the challenge critics face when reading texts whose assumptions about subjectivity differ radically from modern ideologies of self and other. William Wandless, for example, is one of several critics who selectively uses Smith's ideas to help interpret the sentimental novel. He quotes Smith as follows:

> As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves

> should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. (qtd. 56–7)

Sentiment, Wandless concludes, necessarily involves "self-created fictions of observation." He applies this principle to the eighteenth-century novel of sensibility, describing it as "an attempt to skirt difficulties associated with the impossibility of expressing fully those inexpressible aspects of the human condition" (57). Quoting exactly the same passage from Smith, Markman Ellis likewise emphasizes the "fundamental discontinuity between the quality of feeling of the viewer and the sufferer of pain or fear" (13). The literature of sentiment, these critics seem to argue, offers its audience a palliating fantasy in which "how it feels" can actually be shared across subjectivities – in spite of the fact that it is an "impossibility" to share its "inexpressibility," or bridge its "fundamental discontinuity." This may be the case with regard to the sentimental novel, but proving it via Smith is problematic. Neither critic refers to Smith's subsequent remarks, which are as follows:

> By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body and become in some measure him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (2–3)

Depictions of subjectivity that feature bodies sympathizing with each other through "self-created fictions" or "fundamental discontinuity" are hard to reconcile with Smith's striking image of "enter[ing] . . . into [another's] body and becom[ing] in some measure him." His vision of subjective interchange, of shared bodily knowledge as intimate as sexual penetration, is incompatible with critical readings that emphasize subjective isolation rather than sympathetic interchange.

The novel of sentiment capitalizes on this potential for conceiving of bodily subjectivity as a social (and socializing) force. Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, for example, is an overtly political text, which sharply criticizes the practice of impressment (63–5), the inadequacy of female education (27), and the expanding British presence in India (72–3). In most cases, however, it makes its case for change based on sympathy's ability to create consensual domains between persons widely separated by political circumstances. In India, a British soldier sees a local man being flogged in an attempt to extort money; the soldier sets him free, and is then flogged himself. The culmination of this episode is a sentimental tableau in which the Indian embraces the Englishman, assists him, and *gives* him the money which was at the root of the shared floggings: "'You are an Englishman,' said he, 'But the Great Spirit has given you an Indian heart' (65–6). In the same way that both bodies can suffer the strokes of a flogging, both can experience the sentimental moment which makes one "heart" intelligible to another.

In the light of the subsequent development of British colonialism, this vignette presents many difficulties. The Indian man appears primarily as a potential source of wealth for Englishmen, rather than a subject in his own right; he is incapable of engineering his own rescue; and his most attractively depicted characteristic is gratitude to, and tolerance for, the episode's English hero. If one substitutes India itself into these representations, one has an uncomfortably complete agenda for the establishment of the British Raj. Nonetheless, sympathy, as a social force, provided the late eighteenth century a discourse wherein the possibility of shared experience across differentials of political power could, by means of the sensitive body, at least be imagined as possible.

## Mediated "feeling": Representation and the one-handed reader

The doctrine of sympathy required some elaboration for cases in which the transfer of feeling from one body to another was not direct – for example, where it occurred via a text. Not everyone agreed that sympathy operated as straightforwardly as sentimental novels sometimes suggested. The philosopher Hume, for example, endorsed the idea that feelings could be shared across bodily boundaries (e.g., "we often feel by communication the pains and pleasures of others" (*Treatise* 193), but was careful to insist that sympathy between bodies involved an intermediary mental step: a "lively idea" which led to an actual "impression" (164). Concepts like Hume's "lively idea" were necessary to address the problem of how sentimental *representations* could evoke sympathetic reactions in their audiences. If "how it feels" were a bodily phenomenon, and if sympathy were the bridge by which this bodily phenomenon could penetrate beyond the individual to influence the sensibilities of others, then how could a novel, a painting, or a play evoke the sentimental experience? Were these experiences mere self-generated counterfeits of sympathy? Contemporary critics were quick to point out how easily the physical manifestations of sensibility could be imitated. Writers of anti-*Pamela* literature, for example, delighted to paint Richardson's most famous sentimental heroine as no more than a superlative fraud:

> [H]er Colour would come and go, her Eyes sparkle, grow Languid, or overflow with Tears, her Bosom heave, her Limbs tremble; she would fall into Faintings, or appear transported, and as it were out of herself; and all this so natural, that had

> the whole College of Physicians been present, they could not have imagin'd it otherwise than real. (Haywood 3)

Perhaps the ability to feel a sympathetic response to representations of experience was only a more complete version of the deceptions practiced by Fielding's Shamela, extending to include not only its observers, but the individual him- or herself.

Contemporary proponents of the powers of sensibility and sympathy, however, seem surprisingly untroubled by this possibility; representation, in their view, is an acceptable and effective intermediate link between individual subjectivities. Burke's highly influential *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, for example, argues that it is by sympathy "that we . . . are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost any thing which men can do or suffer" (21). This makes sympathy one of the necessary prerequisites to "judg[ing] properly of any work designed to affect [the passions]" (36) – the foundation, in other words, of aesthetic experience as well as social life, of the emotional responses of spectator, as well as participant.

Between writer and reader, artist and observer, playwright and audience, representation is not a barrier to sympathy, but a matrix which permits sympathetic communication to take place – as the nervous matrix permits the sympathetic coordination of body functions. One novelist prefaces her work with the following explanation, couched in the terms of natural philosophy, and employing once more the figure of matched strings sharing vibrations:

> . . . the whole flows from Sympathy, and the Laws of Harmony, which govern the whole Universe, and can only be explained by the famous Example of the two violins tuned to the same Pitch, where if you strike upon either, the other of itself

> emits the same Sound, that is, if the Note struck be within its Pitch; and in the same Manner, if the Author and Reader are tuned to the same Key, that is, are both equally disposed to be pleased with themselves and all about them, and if the Author laughs you a Laugh of his own, or sighs and drops a Tear of his own Product, it is impossible but according to the mechanic Laws, by which the Muscles are governed, but the Fellow instrument, the Reader, or the Hearer must echo the same Note, to the great Pleasure and Satisfaction of them both. (*History of Charlotte Summers* 226–7)

The fact that no explanation was available for a phenomenon, whether it involved violins or novels, was insufficient reason for dismissing it. The very definition of sympathy, after all, assumed that the means and the medium of communication were obscure. Royal Society member William Cullen pointed out that the popular musical illustration employed above, for example, could only have been called a true instance of sympathy "when the nature of sounds was little understood." Since the movement of soundwaves through the air had since been demonstrated experimentally, "it would be ridiculous to call it so now." On the other hand, Cullen states, when "we have no distinct notion of the communication of motion between . . . parts, we may use the term" (27). The very incomprehensibility of representation's ability to transmit feelings from one person to another was a strong proof that it was truly sympathy at work. It was inexplicable, but reliable, and the sentimental author could invoke it with confidence: "Gentle reader, would you desire more of this terrible scene? – Ah, no! – your heart and mine must be made of the same materials: – what, for tears, I cannot write, you from sympathy, would not be able to read!" (Gunning, *Orphans* 200). The shared *experience* was of primary interest; the representation itself, like the "lively idea," was simply a mysterious means to this end.

The mediating potential of text for the late-eighteenth-century reader was perhaps at its most noticeable in the period's most explicit fictions of "how it feels": its nascent pornography – "*ces dangereux livres qu'une belle dame de par le monde trouve incommodes, en ce qu'on ne peut, dit-elle, les lire que d'une main*" (Rousseau 56).[16] If representations could transmit sentimental feelings of compassion or affinity, then they could also make less acceptable experiences available to their readership. Pornography, in particular, owed both its popularity and its infamy to its ability to propagate illicit sexual experience. This highly literalized understanding of how pornography worked on the reader's feelings meant, in the first place, that literature in this genre was considered rather a sexual tool than a text *per se*. Late-eighteenth-century writers were clear on the point that pornography was primarily a masturbatory aid, and/or an instrument for achieving sexual arousal before engaging in some other sexual act. Brothel clients in John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, for example, look at pornographic engravings while awaiting their partners (66), and the *Memoirs* themselves make an appearance in *The Register-Office* as preparatory reading for hopeful gallants (Reed 36). Pornography was not about having sex; it was part of having sex.

Late-eighteenth-century pornography's contemporary critics were equally convinced that it was the handmaid of masturbation. Their language was generally more veiled than that of pornographic writers, though equally vivid; some cautionary texts make the connection between pornography and masturbation more explicit by specifically targeting young men as the audience for their warnings. William Dodd's *Sermons to Young Men*, for example, rails against:

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[16] "Those dangerous books that one fashionable woman finds inconvenient because one can't read them, she says, with just one hand" [my translation].

> a kind of writings so impure and defiling, that it is scarcely possible to speak of them without incurring some degree of defilement; –for who can touch pitch and be clean? . . . You will find, my young friends, the combat with your passions sufficiently strong: . . . if you allow yourselves in the use of any thing [sic] which serves to inflame and arouse those passions, how can you ever expect a victory over them? And, believe me, books of that immoral sort, from the use of which I am dissuading you, are inflammatory to a high degree . . . . (264–5)

The Bishop of Llandaff's *Religious Tracts*, intended for "Students in the Universities and the younger Clergy" (Watson v), comes still closer to naming outright the connection between "these detestable books" and masturbation:

> They prove to an infinity of persons, but especially to young people, schools of licentiousness. It is by the reading of them, that youth learn to know and to love vice. . . . [W]e see in fact, that uncleanness is commonly the first sin and the first passion which seduces men in their youth, and which engages them into vice, for their whole life. . . . (Watson 291–2)

Jonathan Mayhew's *Sermons to Young Men* makes clear exactly what kind of "uncleanness" is under discussion:

> There are divers kinds of leudness [sic] and impurity, which belong to this head, besides adultery and fornication in the common gross sense. We read in scripture of "committing adultery in the heart;" and of some persons who have 'eyes full of

> adultery, and that cannot cease from sin.' . . . There are some still more unnatural, shameful and brutal sins, which belong to this head. For, as the apostle observes, it is "even a shame to speak of those things which are done of some in secret." I shall therefore spare at once your modesty and my own, in not being more particular—— (60–1)

Those wishing to stamp out masturbation, and those producing texts specifically for that use, thus agreed: whatever the political, artistic, or philosophical content of a pornographic text might be, its primary and most significant effects lay within the reader's bodily experiences of it. These texts were, to their contemporaries, 'real' to the point of intense personal experience, and, perhaps, actual danger.[17]

The one-handed reader, then, deserves a place of some importance in critical examinations of late-eighteenth-century pornography, as a kind of limit case of subjective experience transmitted from body to body, through text. Who is this reader, and how does he/she behave? In the first place, this reader has always one hand on the text, and the other on his or her own body, signifying that *both* are necessary elements in the subjective experience of pornography. Bradford Keyes Mudge's *The Whore's Story* eloquently articulates the manner in which this posture complicates ideas of representation which consist of simple dichotomies such as real/imaginary or bodily/textual:

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[17] For an example of how the inclusion of readerly experience can enrich a critical reading of eighteenth-century pornographic texts, see Randolph Trumbach's "Erotic fantasy and male libertism in Enlightenment England," in *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800*, ed. Lynn Avery Hunt (NY: Zone Books, 1993), pp. 253–82.

> At the very moment that readers violate an imaginary privacy and derive voyeuristic pleasure from a "Criminal" trespass they share with the characters they are reading about, at the same moment that the calculated eroticism of the text works its magic and asserts the fundamental "truth" of the body, the book itself, the material object that they hold in their hands, publicly published and publicly circulated, confirms an objective reality and a readerly distance that reasserts itself only when the consumer disengages from the text. (136)

The "magic" Mudge invokes here would be, to a late-eighteenth-century reader, easily intelligible as an agency as "real" and "physical" as the body itself, one based in the nervous system and its natural processes: sympathy, transmitting experiences between reader and author by means of the text. For the one-handed reader, the mystery of representation is a matter of personal fact.

Further, the presence of the one-handed reader demonstrates that the sympathetic communication provided by representation is not one-sided; the one-handed reader's body communicates with the writer of pornography, as the pornographic writer's text communicates with its reader. Like the collector of exempla, the one-handed reader does not read in a continuous, linear fashion; the orgasmic peak(s) of his or her masturbation, or the transfer of his or her sexual experience from preparatory arousal to other sexual activities, interrupts his or her erotic engagement with the textual narrative – in all likelihood, repeatedly. This dictates, for example, the repetitious structure and episodic plot which characterize the pornographic novel (DeJean 114); the one-handed reader encounters each explicit vignette as an element only partially attached to a linear narrative. If he or she does choose to proceed through the pornographic text in a straight line from end to end, he or she needs to be accommodated with points of rest or contrast between each period of arousal. More than one critic has commented on the occasional discontinuities within eighteenth-century pornographic novels: the comic and/or grotesque episodes of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* that strike critic Peter Wagner as "detrimental" (29); or the almost detachable philosophical interludes of Sade's *Justine*, which mark "rupture[s] with the effect of accumulation and repetitive continuity" (Goulemot and Weiss 72). These interruptions, I would suggest, are not necessarily flaws (deliberate or otherwise) in a continuous pornographic narrative; they may be strategic moments of variation, provided as 'palate cleansers' for the reader in those moments not dominated by "the high pitch of excitement to which, traditionally, the pornographic narrative tries to lead the reader" (Goulemot and Weiss 73). This "high pitch," like the highlights in chiaroscuro painting, is easier to maintain when placed in relief.[18]

Thus, the body of the one-handed reader both responds to and determines the late-eighteenth-century pornographic text; sympathy, in this period's understanding of the word, allows pornographic textual representation to unite the reader with the author, and possibly other readers as well, in the "real" experience of how it feels to be sexually aroused by a pornographic textual representation – and one's other hand. The sympathetic experience traversing pornographic text, reader, and writer is memorably visualized in the frontispiece to the 1748 Frankfurt edition of *Histoire de Dom B—*, which titillates with an image of the pornographic author, accompanied by his priapic muse, masturbating while writing the very text the viewer presumably holds in his or her hand (Fig. 1). The pornographic novel, in this depiction, is a social experience.

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[18] This is an argument I would like to take further, in future research. The kind of structural *non sequiter* Wagner remarks in Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* could very well be a component of, and not a departure from, the "new pornographic genre that Cleland's novel represented" (Trumbach 254). The anonymous Victorian author of *My Secret Life* (c. 1888), for example, includes similar episodes, and periodical pornography has a long tradition of including short stories, articles, or interviews which have little or no sexual content. The pop culture stereotype of the consumer who reads porn magazines "for the articles" may not be a joke, after all.

Finally, the posture of the one-handed reader renders all elements of a pornographic text, except the erotic, radically unstable. It is impossible to overestimate how thick the irony can lie on a text meant to be read while masturbating, and this substantially troubles critical engagement with it. Many critics handling *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, for example, approach them with the (usually tacit) understanding that they "tell more than they would seem to." Critics then focus on this "more," giving it coherent contours as "an idyllic pornotopic celebration of sexuality, a healthy celebration of feminine desire, as a serious defense of philosophical materialism, . . . a phallocentric glorification of patriarchal authority" (Flynn 284) – or whatever. The one-handed reader, however, fundamentally challenges the credibility of all these readings, because he or she acknowledges the bodily experience of "how it feels" as the index of sympathetic engagement with the pornographic text. If critical responses such as those mentioned above stand as readings, then they do so only because the critic resists an erotic experience of the text, substituting the ineffable "more" for the sexual experience of reading pornography. Can (or more importantly, would) any one-handed reader genuinely consider the pornotopic, feminist, materialist, or patriarchal meaning(s) of the *Memoirs* while using them as a masturbatory aid?

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Figure 1: Frontispiece to *Histoire de Dom B—* (Frankfurt, 1748), as reprinted in *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800*, ed. Lynn Avery Hunt (NY: Zone Books, 1993), p. 17.

On the contrary, to extract these meanings, the critic must keep both hands in view at all times, and by doing so, exclude him- or herself from sympathetic communication with the text's writer, and with those readers engaging with the text's central functions. From the one-handed reader's point of view, the literary critic has no escape from the dilemma posed by late-eighteenth-century pornography: he or she must either join the one-handed reader in an erotic experience of the text – which displaces all other readings to marginal positions; or reject the experiences of the one-handed reader – thereby demonstrating that his or her criticism misses the point of the book.

I would suggest, for example, that strong materialist readings of the *Memoirs* place a largely unwarranted faith in the text's ideological stability. While depictions of sexual activity as a natural mechanism are certainly present, the text undercuts them in multiple ways. Materialist interpretations of the *Memoirs* had an early exponent in Leo Braudy, whose 1970 article "Fanny Hill and materialism" characterized the novel as "a defense of the materialist view of human nature popularized by the publication of *l'Homme machine* only a little over a year before" (22). Peter Wagner's critical introduction to a controversial 1985 edition of the *Memoirs*[19] reiterates Braudy's view, describing the text as "indebted to materialism" and, in particular, to *l'Homme machine* (22). In 1993, Margaret C. Jacobs made a similar argument in a more wide-ranging and historically nuanced study, which maintains that eighteenth-century "pornographic narratives employed philosophical materialism, which their writers extracted from the new mechanical, scientific reading of nature" (158).[20] Seen in this light, the novel's descriptions of the motion of "animal spirits" (e.g., Cleland 101), its demonstrative use of the hydrostatics of "compressive exsuction" (221), and, perhaps most famously, "Fanny's constant use of the word 'machine' to refer to the penis" (Braudy 29), create a coherent representation of a radically materialist body, which "responds mechanically, like a mere machine" (Braudy 30).

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[19] This edition, like Peter Sabor's of the same year, is an almost unprecedented, fully unexpurgated version of the *Memoirs*. In particular, it includes a "sodomy scene" which has been censored "from almost every edition since the novel first appeared" (Sabor 264–5).

The *Memoirs*' mechanical representations, however, can as easily be read as a critique of materialist models, echoing the reactionary vitalist science of the 1730s and 40s (Brown 179–82). The novel's "Good-natured Dick" episode, for example, which Braudy remarks for its use of mechanical concepts and metaphors, does not offer its reader an unambiguous replication of la Mettrie's "human machine" (la Mettrie 59).[21] The episode shares its use of an extended metaphor with several of the novel's other vignettes; Fanny's encounter with a sailor who "seized [her] as a prize" is packed with nautical terminology,[22] and her "reception into the sisterhood" at Mrs. Cole's brothel is recounted using mock-ecclesiastical terms.[23] The mechanical context of Dick's adventure is, I would argue, another of these extended comic metaphors. Cleland's description travels into the ludicrous when he describes this "man-machine" as "mak[ing] all smoke again" with his activity (201), and the scene's references to nature's "operation," the "principles" of pleasure," and the "motion" which "wind[s] up the springs" (199–200) demonstrate the same kind of thematic *double entendre*, in terms of natural philosophy, which earlier scenes provided using naval and religious terms.

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[20] I find Jacobs convincing in her thorough analyses of French pornographic texts, but I would argue that her overall argument about the role of materialist (and, more specifically, mechanist) thought is not a very good fit for Cleland's *Memoirs*, which she evaluates in a less detailed manner.

[21] Cleland refer to Dick as both "man-machine" and "brute-machine" (199, 201), which in itself implies that the novelist may be making play with la Mettrie's philosophy.

[22] Examples of this terminology include: "towed along"; "man-of-war"; "fell directly on board"; "battery"; "master-hand"; "canting"; "altered . . . his course"; and "broadside" (177–8).

[23] Such terms include: "chapter"; "ceremonial"; "preaching . . . the doctrine"; "conform"; "edifying by these wholesome lessons"; "forms"; and "dispensation" (142–4).

The episode featuring Dick is not only comic, but satirical, and challenges materialist philosophy with an appeal to the power of sympathy. While the scene refers to materialist ideas, its primary metaphorical theme is "nature." Dick's penis is a "sensitive plant," and his "instinct-ridden . . . animal passion" (201) likens him to a flower, a steer, a winter storm, a whirlwind – and to "negroes" and "savage[s]" as well (198–200). Dick the "natural" is thus representative of all those aspects of nature which are without "the sublimer intellectual [gifts]" (200): the inanimate, the animal, and the (purportedly) sub-human. His "purely sensitive" existence (202), however, has its own "advantages and superiority," which permit this scene to exceed the comic limitations of the (rather unarousing) humourous episodes in which the sailor and the brothel-keeper feature. The extended comic metaphor in the episode of the sailor has the effect, Wagner notes, of "toning down the pornographic elements" of the description (229), but this is not necessarily the case in the tale of "Good-natured Dick." Cleland's narrative increases in explicitness and slips into the present tense as Dick's sexual experience continues, and concurrent with this heightened eroticism, a strange mingling of identities occurs. He becomes "greater than himself," commanding "respect" from his observer; his partner Louisa, on the other hand, goes "out of her mind" and becomes genuinely machine-like, without volition, existing only in the "ecstasies of the senses" (200–1). Cleland underlines the function of sympathetic "consent" in this exchange by referring to the oft-repeated simile of sounding strings:

> [S]he lay . . . without other sensation of life than in those exquisite vibrations that trembled yet on the strings of delight, which had been so ravishingly touched, and which nature had been too intensely stirred with, for the senses to be quickly at peace from. (202)

Through the power of sympathy, and of bodily "nature . . . intensely stirred," a "purely sensitive idiot" receives "all another life," at the same time that a person of average capacities loses every faculty except sensation (201–2). The interaction of lived experience, the episode demonstrates, can produces phenomena which, like the motions of a sensitive plant, cannot easily be explained using purely materialist models. So long as subjective experience can be shared (and intensified) between bodies, no creature can be considered a "mere machine" (201).[24]

To interpret this scene, as Braudy does, as an endorsement of materialism (49), is to underestimate the complexities of reading one-handed. Cleland's references to materialist philosophy in his depiction of Dick and Louisa are satirized simply by their juxtaposition with the primary expectations of the contemporary reader, which rely on sympathy for their fulfillment. Further, Cleland slyly underlines the force of his objection to materialism by making adjustments to the episode's capacity to arouse. Its comic framing initially damps its erotic force, but as the sympathetic union it describes gains in intensity, so does the text's potential as an aid to masturbation – itself a result of sympathy.[25] By reading late-eighteenth-century pornographic texts as documents which are primarily political, social, historical, etc. in nature, a literary critic may certainly extract valid, useful political, social, historical, etc. interpretations of them. This is not, however, the same as reading pornography.

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[24] In the novel's culminating vignette, this mingling of identities reoccurs. When Fanny is reunited with her first male lover, a joining of erotic and sentimental experience all but obliterates the separation of self and other: "all assured me of a concord of joy . . . I imagined such a transfusion of heart and spirit as that, coaliting and making one body and with him, I was him, and he, me" (221). Cleland contrasts this "true refining passion" (217) with the "passion purely animal . . . struck out of the collision of the sexes, by a passive bodily effect" (101), which characterizes Fanny's professional sexual activities.

What is true of the late eighteenth century's pornography applies equally, I would argue, to any other literature from this period that focuses with similar intensity on "how it feels." The intermittent quality of pornographic narrative, for example, is replicated in sentimental literature, though perhaps not to the same degree. The physical sensations communicated to the reader through the sentimental text, critic Janet Todd points out, require similar textual respites in order to ripen:

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[25] Typically, Cleland undercuts his own objection to materialism in a later scene, in which Fanny is at last reunited with Charles. This episode's language reproduces and inverts the novel's earlier description of her defloration by Charles. "[P]ointing [her] eyes" just as he ensured that his penis was "rightly pointed," Fanny discovers his identity with a "piercing alertness" which echoes the moment his penis "pierced" her. Finally, with "transport" which duplicates the "transporting" pleasures of her first encounter with him, she consummates the (re)union: "I, that instant, with the rapidity of the emotions that I felt the spur of, shot into his arms, crying out . . ." (214, 78–9). This scene, unlike the defloration episode, contains no obvious erotic charge; its unlikely erotic language is thus a satirical jab at the exaggerated nature of the sentimental experience – which Cleland previously invoked to deflate materialism.

> [E]mphasis is not on the subtleties of a particular emotional state but on the communication of common feeling from sufferer or watcher to reader or audience. . . . All present these contrasts and the exemplary emotion in tableaux . . . when they occur, the story or argument is arrested so that the author can conventionally intensify the emotion and the reader or spectator may have time physically to respond. (4–5)

Late-eighteenth-century texts that depict "how it feels," whether these feelings are erotic or sentimental, show the imprint of the reader's body, and the reader's body, in turn, displays a sympathetic reaction to these depictions of feeling. If this exchange is not present, then the text in question is neither pornographic nor sentimental for its reader. There is no necessary crisis of representation in the experiences of the late-eighteenth-century sympathetic reader; he or she may rely on the power of sympathy to link more than one subjectivity in the (deeply physical) experience of "how it feels."

## Summary: In search of "how it felt"

At London's Victoria and Alberta Museum, I was once given the opportunity to try on a replica of the hoop an English lady of the late eighteenth century would have worn to support the skirts of her court costume. The assistant who helped me secure the hoop over my clothes suggested that I try seating myself on a nearby chair once I was arrayed. As I bumped my way to the chair and perched myself gingerly on the extreme edge of its seat, I recalled a scene in Maria Edgeworth's novel *Belinda*, in which Lady Delacour challenges a young man to "manage a hoop" as ably as a lady (74). It occurred to me that I was having, at least to a degree, an actual sensation of this young man's experiences. Though Edgeworth is dust, and her characters never had any physical existence to begin with, the hoop, as an object, still preserves to some extent the feelings of a late-eighteenth-century body, in a highly literal way.

"How it felt" is not an article necessarily intangible, subjective, incommunicable. In the late eighteenth century in particular, "how it felt" was a category that delimited experiences and sensations that were inextricably located in the body, yet could traverse bodily boundaries to function in other subjectivities, even those whose only contact with each other occurred by means of representational objects such as novels, paintings, or plays. Being able to locate and accept "feeling" on these terms opens new opportunities for analyzing this period's literary depictions of "how it feels." The following chapter reads Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* as a comic interrogation of the epistemology of bodily experience, given the particular possibilities which contemporary ideas of body and subjectivity acknowledged.

# The strange case of Lady Delacour's goldfish: *Belinda* and the epistemology of breastedness

The situated bodily subjectivity discussed in the previous chapter carried with it a complex of possibilities for understanding subjectivity in relation to bodily difference. Could all bodies, of whatever kind, share the permeability and communicativeness which medical and sentimental discourse ascribed to them? In *Belinda*, Edgeworth suggests that any kind of bodily difference – adult/child, animal/human, man/woman – presents interpretive difficulties which require all the perspecuity, intellectual humility, and imagination one can summon. Drawing on her extensive familiarity with contemporary science (and scientists), she presents the challenge of knowing another body's experiences as a kind of natural philosophy, susceptible to Hunterian techniques of observation and analysis. Lady Delacour, the cleverest of the novel's bumbling investigators, demonstrates how knowledge of one's own bodily experiences also forms part of this complex epistemological terrain. In particular, her experience of breastedness as a mother displays her ability to manage and to learn from her own body.

The centrality of the female breast in *Belinda* ties the novel into a broad contemporary field of political contest involving gender. The nature and meaning of human sexual dimorphism were, in any case, in flux during the eighteenth century, as part of an overall redefinition of how body and gender were interconnected:

> As the natural body itself became the gold standard of social discourse, the bodies of women – the perennial other – thus became the battleground for redefining the ancient, intimate, fundamental social relation: that of woman to man. Women's bodies, in their corporeal, scientifically accessible concreteness, in the very nature

> of their bones, nerves, and most important, reproductive organs, came to bear an enormous new weight of meaning. (Laqueur 150)[1]

Sensibility, with its potentially permeable, feeling body, was a significant agent on this "battleground." The theory of animal spirits was originally formulated without reference to gender, and initially offered grounds for a feminist reading of the nervous system and its effects. If all experiences were mediated by the nerves, then there could be no essential difference between the male and female 'mind' (Barker-Benfield 2–3). The new neurophysiology quickly developed, however, into a field where sexual difference could be affirmed (Barker-Benfield 5, Todd 19). By 1753, nerve-doctor George Cheyne could identify the structure of the nerves as evidence of sexual difference: "*Females* in general, hav[e] weaker, but more delicat [sic] and pliable Bodies and Spirits" (281). By 1771, this difference was explicitly a sign of the inferiority of the female body: "the Nerves of the female are delicate, weak, and easily put into hurries; yet by moderate exercise, and many prudent aids, they may be brought to share, even the fatigues of men" (Collington 3). In the words of literary historian G. J. Barker-Benfield, "the potential for women in sensational psychology seemed to be short-circuited" (3).

*Belinda*, I would argue, contests this authoritative subordination of female bodily subjectivity. Edgeworth revises the novel of sentiment into a didactic text which focuses on the epistemology of lived experience. Her novel, with its fragmented, multivalent structure, repeatedly tempts the reader's certainty with conflicting observations and analyses, thus emphasizing the importance of understanding *how* one may know the lived experiences of another body, before making judgments as to *what* these experiences are. In Chapter 3, I will address further the political implications of epistemology (how one may know) and ontology (what something is) for issues of female bodily subjectivity in the particular case of maternal nursing.

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[1] Laqueur's analysis of this "new weight of meaning," however, largely excludes the breast from among women's "most important, reproductive organs." In my reading of his analysis, he follows Freud in locating sexual difference almost entirely below the waist. For a scholarly objection to this omission, see Simon Richter's "Wet-nursing, onanism, and the breast in eighteenth-century Germany" (*J Hist Sexuality* 7.1 (1996)), pp. 1–22.

In this chapter, I first demonstrate how Edgeworth contextualizes the gendering of lived experience within other kinds of bodily difference. Using the perspectives of vitalist science, she highlights the importance of developing a flexibility of imagination which can defer authoritative judgment, in favour of experimental knowledge, where the experiences of other bodies are concerned. In particular, I use the novel's depiction of goldfish as an example of how even apparently insignificant bodies have proprietary subjective knowledges, which can best be understood by means of experiment and careful observation. Second, I examine how Edgeworth employs an "aesthetics of play" (Meyers 110) to create an educative reading experience concerning the epistemology of bodily subjectivity. The novel guides the reader through complex spirals of representation and counter-representation, which bring into question various authoritative readings of the body – including those of the novel's didactic narrator, and of the reader him- or herself. By mocking and manipulating certainty throughout the novel, Edgeworth highlights the "epistemological modesty" (Brown 252) necessary for navigating the complexities of trying to know another body's experiences. Finally, I analyze how Lady Delacour, the novel's most prominent character, situates her breast as a consensual domain, whereby she can be agential in communicating those aspects of bodily experience which are most crucial to her subjective life. By participating in how knowledge of her breast is created, she insists on the primacy of her own bodily knowledge, in the face of prescriptive ideas of what a body of her class and gender must be.

Overall, Edgeworth's novel is optimistic about the possibility of attaining a knowledge of a different body's experiences (no matter how distantly separated from one's own), though she is careful not to minimize the difficulties involved. I would argue that she repositions the novel of sentiment as an education in the epistemological modesty necessary for understanding the experiences of other bodies. As a result, she re-opens the science and the literature of sensibility to feminist readings, and applies a feminist reading of her own to breastedness.

## Fish ears: Or, the problem of bodily knowledge

Edgeworth gives an oddly prominent role to goldfish in *Belinda.* There is nothing odd about the inclusion of animals *per se* – from Thomson's dying stag,[2] to Cowper's tame hare[3] or Anna Letitia Barbauld's trapped mouse,[4] depictions of animals (in third-, second-, or even first-person) are a staple of sentimental literature. Edgeworth's goldfish differ from these, however, in that the reader is never called upon to sympathize with any subjective experience they might have; one may very well fulfill the sentimental ideal by "feel[ing] for all that lives" (Barbauld 39), but nothing in *Belinda* suggests that this should extend to Lady Delacour's fish. Nor do they, like Swift's Houyhnhnms or Isaac Watts's busy bee, invoke the far older tradition of beast fable by pointing a moral or emblematizing a human quality (Burns 339). The goldfish resolutely remain goldfish throughout the course of the novel. They swim – they eat – and no more.

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[2] "The big round tears run down his dappled face; / He groans in anguish" (29).

[3] "If I survive thee I will dig thy grave, / And when I place thee in it, sighing say, / I knew at least one hare that had a friend" (109).

[4] "If e'er thy breast with freedom glow'd, / And spurn'd a tyrant's chain, / Let not thy strong oppressive force / A free-born mouse detain" (38).

Despite their lack of emotional urgency or moral force, however, Edgeworth features them repeatedly in *Belinda.* Clarence Hervey, the novel's hero, first encounters them after nearly drowning in a local river (96) – a circumstance sufficient in itself to link the man with the fishes. Their introduction is also concurrent with the first appearances of: Dr X— (93), whose sage counsel will eventually save Lady Delacour's life (315–16); Lady Anne Percival and her family (98), who serve as the *beau ideal* of domestic life in the novel (121); and Helen, Lady Delacour's neglected daughter (101). These fresh characters, and a newly thoughtful Hervey (118), gather for the first time with the goldfish at the centre of their group:

> They found Lady Anne Percival in the midst of her children . . . . The children . . . happened to be looking at some gold fish [sic], which were in a glass globe . . . . One of the little boys flipped the glass globe, and observed, that the fish immediately came to the surface of the water, and seemed to hear the noise very quickly; but his brother doubted, whether the fish heard the noise, and remarked, that they might be disturbed by seeing or feeling the motion of the water, when the glass was struck. Dr X— observed, that this was a very learned dispute, and that the question had been discussed by no less a person than the abbé Nollet, and he related some of the ingenious experiments tried by that gentleman to decide, whether fishes can or cannot hear. (98–99)

The goldfish reappear repeatedly in the remainder of the novel, and each appearance catalyzes an important plot point. The fish serve as the focus of Belinda's first interaction with Helena (162), and their transfer from Helena to Lady Delacour marks the start of a rapprochement between the two (169–70). It is a delivery of fish food (284) that provides the pretext for the ultimate reunion of Lady Delacour with her love-starved daughter (290), the emergence of matrimonial intimacy between Lady Delacour and her estranged husband (291–2), and the recompense of a poor gardener once heedlessly ruined by Lady Delacour's pranks (292). For an animal character *in propria persona*, this is a not inconsiderable role to play in the action of a sentimental novel.

Lady Delacour's goldfish are, I would argue, one (relatively minor) element in a complex thematic construction which permeates *Belinda*, bringing together its sometimes scattered characters and plotlines. Edgeworth includes an almost dizzying array of permutations relating to subjectivity, knowledge, and bodily difference. Numerous elements in the book, including the goldfish, can be linked to some issue involving "how it feels" to be a certain body, and how such feelings may be known. In their variety and ingenuity, *Belinda*'s experimental demonstrations create a space wherein the reader can explore the possibility that "how it feels" may transcend, not just the bodily boundaries between two subjectivities (if such there be), but bodily difference in general.

Fish, strange to relate, provide Edgeworth with an element that unites contemporary issues of subjectivity, knowledge, and bodily difference. The question which the young scion of Percival raises at the goldfish's first appearance – as to whether or not fish can hear (99) – had been hotly debated throughout the eighteenth century.[5] The lynchpin of the controversy was conflict over what constituted adequate evidence of a fish's experience of sound. Classical authorities had argued that fish responded to noise, and could, therefore, hear (Buffon 273–4). Early eighteenth-century anatomists, however, could find no evidence that fish had organs of hearing; according to the mechanistic models of science in ascendance at this time (Brown 179–82), this meant that fish were deaf. As a new emphasis on experimentation gained ground in the 1730s and 40s (Brown 252), this opinion was attacked in its turn:

> Tho' Fishes are not provided with Organs for Hearing, similar to those serving to that Purpose in other Animals, it would be too presumptuous to declare, without Experiment, that they are unable to hear, by Organs differently placed, whose Situation and Structure, for want of due Examination, we are unacquainted with. (Arderon 150)

The passage above is not without acerbity ("for want of due Examination"), and this tone is fairly typical of contemporary publications on the subject. A review article in the *Philosophical Transactions* summarizes the available experimental and anatomical evidence, then describes one passage of arms in this debate:

> Our Author begins with an Air of Ridicule, and shews how far the Letter-writer is ignorant of the various Opinions, modern as well as antien[illegible] Our learned Countryman Mr. *Ray* thinks to reconcile these, by allowing [illegible]at some hear, while

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[5] In fact, the fish experiment Edgeworth describes in *Belinda* is similar enough to those recounted in one of the *Philosophical Transactions* (Arderon 150–52) as to justify the conjecture that she has put a contemporary scientist's words in the little Percival's mouth.

> others are deaf . . . . But the Letter-writer denies they have any Organs of Voice, merely upon the proverbial Authority, *Mute as a Fish*; hence he concludes they are likewise deaf. . . . From Analogy [our Author] argues, that as no Beast, from the Lion to the meanest Animal, nor from the Eagle to the humming Bird, but can utter a Voice, so he thinks the same general Law is observ'd in the Oeconomy of Fishes: But at the same time our Author here seems to lay too much Weight upon what he supposes final Causes, and metaphysical Arguments, which have in all Ages ruin'd Natural Philosophy. (Brocklesby 234–35)

Both opinions ground themselves on empirical evidence, gathered from dissections and observations of various aquatic species, and both agree on basic facts concerning the structure and behaviour of fish (234–6). The disputed point in this passage, and the source of its acrimony, is not so much the nature of fish as the nature of knowledge. "Authority," "Analogy," "metaphysical Arguments" and even "Ridicule" are all mentioned as possible tools for interpreting the available evidence; whether or not fish can hear, in this context, seems to rely mainly on which method (if any) one accepts as a valid means of interpretation. If "Analogy" produces reliable results, then fish can hear. If "proverbial Authority" defines truth, then fish are deaf. Difficulties such as these arise from the fact that the question "can fish hear?" differs fundamentally from other scientific problems of the eighteenth century, such as "find[ing] the Longitude at Sea" ("Longitude"). Its answer is contained, not within an abstract entity like force or mass, but within the subjective experiences of a body that differs from the investigator's. The fish knows whether or not it can hear; the scientist does not. The varying strategies which eighteenth-century science employed to bridge this knowledge differential were, in fact, strategies for communicating an aspect of "how it feels" across a particularly acute set of bodily boundaries.[6]

The debate about fish hearing was eventually resolved with the publication of John Hunter's "Account of the Organ of Hearing in Fish," in the *Philosophical Transactions* of 1782. An anatomist himself, he granted the importance of a fish's structure for ascertaining whether it has organs of hearing, but he also admitted the need for experiment and observation of living fish in their natural habitat. The celebrated Scottish physician acknowledged the importance of the debate, "it being still a subject of great dispute, whether fish hear or not" (380), and went on to describe his success in dissecting and correctly identifying the system of cavities and tissues which serves as a fish's 'ear.' His researches on this topic were influential enough to be referenced explicitly in Buffon's *Natural History*, which recounts them almost verbatim (279–83), and Hunter himself seems to have been proud of his accomplishment:

> Preparations to illustrate these facts have been ever since shewn in my collection to the curious both of this country and foreigners: when in shewing whatever was

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[6] One of vitalism's influences on the research practice of neurophysiologists was an increased attention to, and reliance upon, subjective bodily experience as empirical evidence. Here is Robert Whytt, for example, refuting an eminent colleague using data collected, not from dissections or observations, but from the testimony of a sufferer: "I enquired particularly of the patient, Whether he felt any pain when the *cornea* was first pierced with the knife employed in that operation: he told me, He thought the pain was much the same with what he used to feel when the skin of his arm was cut in blood-letting. . . . [I]t appears, that the *cornea* is possessed of a remarkable degree of sensibility; and consequently that *M. de Haller*'s position, That all membranes are destitute of feeling, must admit at *least*, of one exception" (111–2). "How it feels" was as legitimate as anatomy or deduction, as a research resource for natural philosophy.

> new, or supposed to be new, the ears of fish were always considered by me as one important article. (380)[7]

His anatomical solution appears, at first glance, to endorse a mechanistic epistemology: to have ears is to be a hearing creature, *Q.E.D.* – the subjective bodily experience of hearing sound is irrelevant, if a sufficient anatomical knowledge of the body can be obtained.

Hunter, however, did not end his investigation at the boundaries of what anatomy could reveal. While his treatise cites anatomy as its ultimate authority, it undercuts this authoritativeness by referring to actual, live fish:

> As it is evident that fish possess the organ of hearing, it becomes unnecessary to make or relate any experiment made with live fish which only tends to prove this fact; but I will mention one experiment, to shew that sounds affect them much . . . . I observed in a nobleman's garden, near Lisbon, a small fish-pond, full of different kinds of fish. . . . Whilst I was laying on the bank, observing the fish swimming about, I desired a gentleman, who was with me, to take a loaded gun, and go behind the shrubs and fire it. . . . The instant the report was made, the fish appeared to be all of one mind, for they vanished instantaneously into the mud at the bottom, raising as it were a cloud of mud. In about five minutes after, they began to appear, till the whole came forth again. (383)[8]

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[7] As Hunter first located the fish's 'ear' "[s]ometime between the years 1750 and 1760" (Hunter 380), it is not impossible that one of "the curious" to whom he showed it was his friend Richard Lovell Edgeworth (Maria's father), who was living in England during this period (Colvin xiv).

[8] If Brocklesby is correct, Hunter was not the first to try this experiment; a lesser-known Swiss researcher provided a similar proof some time earlier (239).

These are the final sentences of the treatise, giving the fish (almost literally) the last word. Hunter seems, here, to be actively resisting anatomy's authority, traditionally based on a radical objectification of the body.[9] As one of Europe's most prominent vitalists, however, he was a motive force in the late eighteenth century's shift away from this model of research, to one focusing on function rather than structure, and on physiology rather than anatomy (Duchesneau 259–60, Bynum 446–7). Within this epistemological framework, locating a fish's ear proves that it can hear, only so far as locating a chicken's wing proves that it can fly. In both cases, experiment and observation are necessary to expand a structural knowledge (of ear canals, or of primary feathers), into a functional knowledge which understands something of the lived experience of being a quick-eared pond fish, or a flightless domestic bird.[10] Hunter does not grant to anatomy the power to determine whether or not fish can hear (383). Instead, he provides a sharp demonstration of anatomy's inability to address the functionality of fish ears. Taking fish out of water, killing them, and cutting them apart (however skillfully), is not an effective method for discovering how "sounds affect them" (383). The subjective bodily experience of hearing sound, he suggests, is a different kind of knowledge than the existence of a fish's ear, and one requiring a different method of investigation.

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[9] Seventeenth-century and early-eighteenth-century anatomical publications tend to distance themselves from "how it feels" to an almost drastic extent. Anatomical subjects are depicted in lifelike poses that indicate leisure, work, and even eroticism – anything but the subjective bodily experience of actual death and/or mutilation. From a mechanistic viewpoint, these visual metaphors neatly encapsulate the complete subordination of the anatomical subject to the anatomist's gaze, "as though cadavers yet retain one aspect of their vanished agency in the form of their ability to surrender agency" (Liepert and Ruecker 4–7, Good 72).

[10] According to Dr. George Catalano of Binghamton University, domestic chickens can keep themselves airborne only for very short periods (http://askascientist.binghamton.edu/nov-dec/24nov05ask.html).

Edgeworth was almost certainly aware of Hunter's achievement. Her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth (as she informed Hunter's wife at a dinner party in 1818), "had been an admirer of Mr.. Hunters [sic] talents . . . he used to meet him at Slaughters coffee house" (Colvin 115).[11] Maria, like her many siblings, shared her father's "delight in science" (Colvin xxiii), and would have had an interest in Hunter's subject matter. Given, further, that she was her father's most earnest student (Kowaleski-Wallace 100), whatever knowledge he had of Hunter's work was undoubtedly available to her. Whether or not the author of *Belinda* had specific knowledge of Hunter's discovery of the fish's 'ear,' the novel nonetheless uses the same issue to raise questions about the value of experiment in knowing the body of another. At the goldfish's first appearance, when the question of fish hearing first arises, she presents her readers with *two* sets of natural philosophers, studying in parallel: Dr X— and Clarence Hervey; and the two little boys. The adults are replete with authoritative knowledge, on topics ranging from Nollet's aquatic experiments to ancient Roman seafood cuisine (99–100). Their knowledge, however, seems mainly to serve a social function, making Dr X— "a general favourite" (98), and allowing Hervey to be "able always to suit his conversation to his companions" (99). It appears to add far less to the actual investigation at hand than the simple expedient (invented and performed by a little boy) of "flip[ping] the glass globe" and watching what happens (99). In spite of the fact that the children have little or no authoritative knowledge, they seem to be better natural philosophers, at the moment Edgeworth describes, than the learned adults who fail to experiment and observe. She seems to be suggesting that immediate experience is at least as useful as authoritative knowledge when faced with problems of body and subjectivity. The scene's emphasis is on immediacy and interaction, between boys and fish, and adults and boys; authority, unaided by mutual experience, does not convince.[12]

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[11] Edgeworth's connections with the Hunter family were many. She and Hunter once shared a publisher in Joseph Johnson (Robb-Smith 262), and her friend Joanna Baillie was Hunter's niece. Joanna's brother, Matthew, took over direction of Hunter's medical school after its founder's death in 1793 (Hunter-Baillie Collection).

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[12] If the first goldfish episode is, in fact, intended to emphasize the role of immediate experience in illuminating lived experience, this emphasis is somewhat complicated by the fact that Edgeworth alludes to the "learned dispute" about fish hearing in the context of Nollet's work on the subject – not Hunter's (99). Nollet's experiments, unlike the one that Hunter recounts, only tested whether or not sound could travel through water – not whether or not fish could hear. In fact, a forthright description of his contributions reads suspiciously like a passage from Swift's "Voyage to Laputa":

> [He] . . . went different Depths under Water, to satisfy himself how far Sounds could be convey'd in that Medium. At four Inches under Water he heard the Sound of a Gun discharged, of a Clock striking, and of a Hunter's Horn . . . . At different Altitudes of Water, none of them exceeding two Feet, he could perfectly distinguish mixt Sounds, when two Bells were struck, or two Pipes sounded together . . . Lastly, he held his Head under the Surface of the Water, so as barely to cover him; but could not hear the Clock strike, which was audible in the open Air at 45 Feet Distance, especially on a Plain. (Brocklesby 237–8)

The picture of an abbé earnestly holding his head in a pond is almost irresistibly funny, especially if one imagines him doing so while his assistants shoot, toot, ring, and blow. By referring to his research, rather than to Hunter's, Edgeworth replaces the definitive with the semi-parodic. Whether one should believe that she does so with conscious intent depends upon one's opinion of the breadth of her scientific knowledge, and the subtlety of her sense of humour.

## Lived experience and the value of facts

Edgeworth's depiction of the problem of fish hearing therefore has a bearing on the novel's other portrayals of subjectivity, knowledge, and bodily difference. Can goldfish hear? If this question is susceptible to experimental inquiry, then Edgeworth is free to suggest a cluster of similar questions: can a man "manage a hoop" like a lady (74–5)? can "Jamaica negroes" die of fright (221–2)? how can you tell what it's *like* to be a creole, a mother, a cancer victim? Edgeworth's aim is not to produce an authoritative account of these experiences ("to be a mother is to have such-and-such a feeling, *Q.E.D.*") – equating, like a mechanist, function with form. Rather, she presents her reader with a broad and disparate body of evidence – introducing a wide array of creatures (a "*man-woman*" (219), an "English mob" (56), an "unnatural mother" (42), and so on) in a variety of (often unlikely) interactions – and encourages the reader to conduct his or her own analysis. Edgeworth dismisses readerly expectations that the novel will ultimately distill itself into a single, extractable lesson ("I never read or listened to a moral at the end

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To be fair, Nollet was not a lone eccentric in his pursuits. Another enthusiast reports his own experiments in England's inland waters, in the *Philosophical Transactions* of 1748:

> I caused a young Man to dive some Feet down, and then to endeavour to halloo, which he did; and I could hear him, though very faintly. But imagining the Sound might come up with the Water he discharged at his Mouth whilst he halloo'd, I contrived a kind of Hand-Granado, which I threw into a Place in the River about nine Feet deep. The Fuzee burnt under Water near 10 Seconds, and then the Granado went off, giving a prodigious hollow Sound, and shaking the adjacent Ground to such a Degree, that the Whole of a large Building, some Yards distant from the Explosion, was put into a Tremor, far beyond what could be expected from so small a Quantity of Powder. (Arderon 155)

Related methods involved gunfire over submerged listeners ("stript quite naked"), and long-distance underwater bell-ringing (Arderon 150–55).

of a story in my life," sniffs Lady Delacour (35)). Instead, she closes the story with a reminder that the task of analysis lies in the reader's hands: "Our *tale* contains a *moral*, and, no doubt / You all have wit enough to find it out" (478).

In the course of delivering its experimental demonstrations, the novel introduces a hermeneutic of suspicion into the sentimental novel, slyly discrediting some of the genre's core characteristics: its reliance on the body's signs; its claims for the power of sympathy; and its attempt to intensify the reading experience. By the time the novel is over, and all the evidence is in, the reader has little left to rely on except the epistemological modesty Edgeworth borrows from vitalist science. The novel is, in fact, an extended course of study employing the Edgeworth educational technique. The little boys in *Belinda*, who wonder about goldfish and get a lecture on Nollet (99), are receiving the kind of educational experience which Richard Lovell Edgeworth provided throughout Maria's childhood, and (in a textbook of education which he co-wrote with her) explicitly recommends:

> It is . . . of great consequence to seize the proper time for introducing a new term; a moment when attention is aware, and when accident has produced some particular interest in the object. In every family opportunities of this sort occur without any preparation, and such opportunities are far preferable to a formal lecture and a splendid apparatus for the first lessons in natural philosophy . . . (*Practical Education* II.458)

*Belinda*, rarely, if ever, offers its lessons using a "splendid apparatus" of articulated moral sentiment; it prefers to take a set of difficult and diverse representations, "put it into the hands of the [student], and let him manage it as he pleases" (*Practical Education* II.458–59).

While *Belinda* wears the guise of a sentimental novel, replete with long-lost parents and difficult loves, it retains the didactic thrust of Edgeworth's earlier writings (Harden 39–41), and expands the novel of sentiment's typical "pedagogy of . . . feeling" (Todd 4) into something more comprehensive in scope. *Belinda*'s incidents, by permitting characters to interact with each other (and, by means of sympathy, with the reader and the author, as well) provide the requisite "moment[s] when attention is aware, and when accident has produced some particular interest" (*Practical Education* II.458) – "accident," in this case, functioning under Edgeworth's control as the novel's author. By inviting the reader to participate in the author's fictional experiments, and by providing explicit examples of which methods produce useful knowledge and which fail, *Belinda* offers an education in knowing *how to know* "how it feels."

As an educator, Edgeworth does not spoon-feed her readers, and her demonstrations prove more by unsettling existing ideas, than by invoking their own authority. *Belinda* encourages the reader, for example, to question the epistemological assumption that the body can be read as a set of signs. The objectified body, in *Belinda* as in Hunter's treatise, does not necessarily provide reliable knowledge of lived experience, whether another's or one's own. In the novel of sentiment, the body usually provides, in the words of critic John Mullan, "a set of indubitable correspondences between internal and external" (113). Sentimental literature routinely uses the body as a trump card in resolving questions of who feels what; blushes, tears, and swoons are infallible tokens of subjective meaning. This epistemology, however, is subjected to subtle ridicule throughout *Belinda*. Characters who claim to have read the body's signs accurately are usually mistaken. The sophisticated Clarence Hervey, for example, blunders when reading the body of another – and his own. He makes two confident claims: that he can identify Lady Delacour "in any disguise" (21); and that Belinda's presence produces a distinctly recognizable bodily reaction in him: "[t]here's a kind of electricity about that girl. I have a sort of cobweb feeling, an imaginary net coming all over me" (24).[13] In a characteristically comic juxtaposition, Edgeworth has him promptly explode both claims with his own behaviour: at the very moment he describes Belinda's unique "electricity," he fails to notice that she is present; and this failure occurs because he has, after all, mistaken her for Lady Delacour. Edgeworth exposes his two-fold error to other major characters, and his embarrassment is depicted in the simplest bodily terms: "he has neither eyes, ears, nor understanding . . . . Dumb! Absolutely dumb: I protest" (27). This depiction is particularly pungent because he has just taken part in a conversation which abused Belinda's family members using similarly objectifying physical terms: "she . . . had neither eyes, nose, mouth, nor legs" (25).

I call such juxtapositions "characteristic" because the novel is littered with judgments based on body which, logical though they may seem in microcosm, appear mistaken or even absurd in the novel's larger context. "[Her] own feelings" make Lady Delacour think she will die (305); and the physical effects of alcohol make Clarence think he can swim (91–2). Because he has a "black face," Juba seems frightening to Lucy

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[13] It is reasonable to argue that this description is completely metaphorical, describing only the likelihood that Belinda is angling for Clarence as a spouse (25). At least one recent critic, however, builds her analysis on the assumption that Clarence is speaking literally; she describes Belinda, in this scene, as a person "aligned with an expansive physical property" (Rosenberg 589).

(244), and because she is perfectly beautiful, Virginia seems heart-free to Clarence (367). In each case, a character comes to a false conclusion based on bodily signs, and in each case, an important incident – a medical procedure (313), a near-drowning (92–3), a wedding (257), or a collapse (464) – demonstrates dramatically that the character was wrong. Judging the body's signs as a code for the subjective experience of another can produce wildly inaccurate results.

Nor can *Belinda*'s reader rely on the bodies of the novel's characters for reliable insights into their lived experiences. When, dressed as the comic muse, Lady Delacour "practic[es] sighing" (26), the scene is dazzlingly complicated: she impersonates a comic figure pretending to be a tragic figure, by comically imitating the tragic sigh of the woman dressed as the tragic muse, for whom Lady Delacour has been mistaken. When, later, the reader is given a glimpse of the true depth of Lady Delacour's tragedy – the fact that, beneath the costume, she conceals a festering wound which she believes to be mortal – this discovery contains both an appeal to sympathy and a rebuke to readerly self-assurance. The image of "her deathlike countenance . . . form[ing] a horrid contrast with her gay fantastic dress," and of the "hideous spectacle" this dress has hidden, is free from authorial satire (31–2); the multiple twists Edgeworth gives to the meaning of "tragedy" in the person of Lady Delacour, however, convey a fierce irony into this culminating scene. *Belinda* is, I would argue, largely constructed at this level of complication, with its multiple layers of apparent connection and hidden conflict. The opportunity to question both the characters' judgments and one's own is an essential part of the reading experience of the novel.

Bodily difference, in particular, seem to present substantial epistemological obstacles. Throughout the novel, it proves to be an intransigent source of misunderstanding, rather than knowledge, between characters. Animals and humans, for example, have difficulty communicating their subjective experiences to each other: Juba-the-dog is, on the one hand, unable to make Mrs. Luttridge appreciate the fact that he is hungry (429–30), and on the other, unable to detect the indifference underlying her affectionate behaviour (425). Similar problems can occur between two human beings. Juba-the-man and Solomon are separated from each other (and from all other characters in the novel) by both physical and linguistic markers; together, each is wholly unable to comprehend the nature of the other's experiences:

> [T]he Jew instantly explained who he was, and producing his large purse, assured Juba, that he was come to lend money, and not to take it from his master; but this appeared highly improbable to Juba . . . [T]he Jew's language was scarcely intelligible to him, and he saw secret terrour in Solomon's countenance. Solomon had an antipathy to the sight of a black, and he shrunk from the negro with strong signs of aversion. Juba would not relinquish his hold; each went on talking in their own angry gibberish as loud as they could . . . . (446–47)

Each character makes vigorous attempts to communicate, but Juba mistakes "strong signs of aversion" for evidence of guilty intent, while Solomon's perceptions are limited, even more sharply, to his own experiences rather than Juba's. The barrier involving language could potentially have been conquered by patience and the power of sympathy (as it is for Helena and Lady Delacour in an earlier incident (170–72)), but the boundaries of bodily difference are, in this case, insuperable: neither can know the other.

Further, sympathetic communication does not offer easy short-cuts around the difficulties involved in the communication of bodily knowledge. The suspicion Edgeworth casts on the idea of an authoritative sentimental body, that "key tenet . . . of the eighteenth-century movement of sensibility" (Montweiler 348), extends as well to the concept of sympathetic communication. *Belinda*'s incidents tend to demonstrate that sympathy is not a wholly transparent medium, by mean of which one body's subjective experience may communicate with that of another, without omission or inaccuracy. On the contrary, the novel repeatedly depicts sympathy's shortcomings as a vehicle. Helena, for example, is emotionally pained by her mother's apparent ill-health (162), but her sensibilities are not acute enough to detect that Lady Delacour has a secret injury. After giving her mother the goldfish as a comfort during her illness, Helena at last embraces her:

> " . . . Kiss me, my child!" The little girl sprang forwards, and threw her arms round her mother, exclaiming, "Oh, mamma! are you in earnest?" and she pressed close to her mother's bosom, clasping her with all her force. Lady Delacour screamed, and pushed her daughter away. (173)

What begins as a stereotypically sentimental scene of family reunion (Todd 5) is given a startling ending; Edgeworth punishes the sentimental reader with a grotesque turn of events where an experience of ecstatic tenderness might have been anticipated.[14] The sympathy linking mother and child, within the text, is insufficient, and the sympathy between author and reader, via the text, has unexpected results as well.

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[14] Edgeworth was consistently critical of those who expected the sensibilities and affections of children to operate with unusual strength and accuracy. "Children who are not sentimentally educated," she wrote, "often offend by their simplicity, and frequently disgust people of impatient feelings, by their apparent indifference to things which are expected to touch their sensibility" (*Practical Education* 1.289).

In fact, the novel repeatedly demonstrates the inadequacy of the sympathetic reading experience as a direct means for gathering 'facts' about subjective experience. In one of the novel's many self-referential comments on the merits and dangers of fiction (MacFadyen 425–6), for example, Edgeworth has Mr. Percival point out that

> [f]rom poetry or romance, young people usually form their early ideas of love, before they have actually felt the passion; and the image which they have in their own minds of the *beau ideal* is cast upon the first objects they afterward behold. (255)

The problem with relying on the impact of fiction, Edgeworth suggests, is that the sympathy it can evoke may precede, and therefore prejudice, direct experience – tainting the experiments, so to speak. *Belinda* provides its own examples of this, deliberately misleading the reader at some points. Concerning Virginia, for example, even the narrator is unreliable, exploiting a subtle slippage between the omniscient viewpoint and Clarence's own, to state categorically that "the affections of this innocent girl had no object but [Clarence] and Mrs. Ormond" (372). In fact, Virginia is secretly "enamoured" with thoughts of a stranger, and eventually declines to marry due to the strength of this "love" (465–69). If even the narrator of a sentimental novel cannot be trusted, the reader will have to tread carefully indeed.

Edgeworth deliberately complicates the reading experience *Belinda* offers, both employing and resisting the power of sympathy, as part of her educational project. She was a strong proponent of the powers of sympathy in assisting learning; *Practical*

*Education*, for example, enthuses: "[s]ympathy is our first, best friend, in education, and by judicious management might long continue our faithful ally" (I.272). Sympathy, however, is a tool which the educator must consciously turn to "useful and amiable purposes" (*Practical Education* I.270). It is precisely *because* fiction's power to produce an immersive reading experience is so profound, given the powers of sympathy, that Edgeworth persistently interrupts it: baulking the sentimental response at certain times (for example, when Helena embraces Lady Delacour); and at others, interpolating and highlighting "real facts," which "[strike] the reader as improbable" (Butler 267).[15] Not all readers enjoy this experience; critics of *Belinda* point out its "less than rational linear plan" (Wein 313), and its "bizarre plot" (Meyers 105); as Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace notes, its structural irresolution is one reason why *Belinda* has tended not to be a critical favorite among Edgeworth's novels (109–10).[16] Further, according to Marilyn Butler, Edgeworth's "jackdaw-like attitude" as a writer militates against thematic coherence as well (240, 260–61). When Butler argues, however, that "Maria had little or no aesthetic instinct to guide her" (270), this overlooks the possibility that Edgeworth is not so much lacking the aesthetic, as privileging the didactic function of literature. Her aim in *Belinda* is not to produce, like an anatomist, a single aesthetic experience that penetrates and reveals the body of her novel. Rather, her writing enforces the "epistemological modesty" of Hunterian science, by undercutting the authority of her characters' judgments, the novel's genre, and her role as author.

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[15] Clarence's wife-rearing experiment with Virginia, for example, is a surprisingly direct parallel to the adventures of Thomas Day, "[Edgeworth's] father's best friend for twenty-three years and a paternal figure Maria was taught to revere in childhood" (Meyers 113, Butler 243).[15] Though Edgeworth publicly acknowledged, and even boasted about, her novels' basis in fact (identifying, for example, "chapter and verse for the female duel and the pigs and the turkeys" (qtd. Butler 243)), she was cagey, nonetheless, about admitting just how extensively she drew on her experiences with specific individuals:

> She went to what now seem surprising lengths to prevent the public from linking all but her complimentary characters with real people. . . . She claimed that she seldom drew from life because she had found that she could not do it successfully. (Butler 258–59)

Her extra-textual references to 'real' life are thus as multi-layered as her textual inventions: Virginia is an allusion, not only to Rousseau, but to a literalization of Rousseau by a historically specific individual – whom Edgeworth (ostensibly) would rather her readers did not identify, in spite of the many clues she provides as to his identity (including the 13-page description of his wife-rearing experiment she later included in the *Memoirs* (214–27)). The question of how the reader is to interpret what Virginia, as a character, feels, is thus layered in problems involving the conjunctions and divisions of experience that constitute narrator and author, reader and writer, 'real' and 'fictional.'

She is more concerned with the obstacles the investigator brings to knowing the experiences of another body, than with the difficulties, great or small, presented by the object of study. The expectations of the investigator are crucial in determining how much of another body's experience one is able to observe and analyze. Even when the novel's most "artless" (371) character attempts to communicate her feelings, with a genuine desire to be understood, she can nonetheless be baulked by the subjective prejudices of an observer. Mrs. Ormond runs a literary experiment on Virginia, the "child of nature" (371), who makes a good-faith effort to explain that she has no romantic attachment to Hervey. Nonetheless, Mrs. Ormond fails to comprehend her:

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[16] See also Marilyn Butler's detailed analysis of *Belinda*'s structure (and structural shortcomings) in *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972), pp. 308–15. Butler argues that the long-standing critical focus on the novel's flaws is at least partially the result of hostility to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, who purportedly "marred" his daughter's work with his literary meddling (282–85).

> "I know all you think, and all you feel: I know," whispered Mrs. Ormond, "the name that is on *your* lips." "No, indeed, you do not: you cannot," cried Virginia, . . . "how could you possibly know *all* my thoughts and feelings? I never told them to you, for, indeed, I have only confused ideas, . . . I do not distinctly know my own feelings. . . . But of this I am certain, that I had not the name, which you were thinking of, upon my lips." "Ah," thought Mrs. Ormond, " . . . Poor girl! she is become afraid of me, and I have taught her to dissemble; but she betrays herself every moment." (381)

In this episode, Mrs. Ormond's epistemological blunders are multiple. She begins her investigation of Virginia's feelings with the assumption that she already "know[s] all." When Virginia's behaviour contradicts her assumption, Mrs. Ormond blames this inconsistency on her subject, rather than on herself: Virginia is "dissembl[ing]" because she is "afraid" to own the truth. Finally, Mrs. Ormond assures herself that every sign Virginia produces actually "betrays" its opposite. Her subjective stance as an investigator is thus, by turns, arrogant, patronizing, and obtuse; she is devoid of the epistemological modesty required of natural philosophers, and as a result, comprehends even less of the state of Virginia's feelings than the inexperienced (and not particularly intelligent) girl does herself. The results of this error cascade throughout the remainder of the novel, until a second experiment, run by Lady Delacour, finally checks them by producing an unmistakably dramatic result: faced with the image of her secret love, Virginia shrieks, drops, and nearly dies. In yet another layer of complex humour, Lady Delacour immediately misdiagnoses this collapse as a sham (464–65). The difficulty in obtaining facts about the lived experiences of others appears to lie, not so much in finding them (since suitable sources seem to be available), as in facing them, once found.

With demonstrations such as these, Edgeworth encourages the reader to join her in resisting reductive attitudes towards the lived experiences of others. The body is not a direct index of subjective life, nor is sympathy, mediated or unmediated, a high road to mutual subjective knowledge. A radically impartial mental stance, imitating the careful, accurate experimentation and observation of Hunterian science, *may* make this knowledge possible. Subjective positioning is a crucial element in this project, as Edgeworth argues explicitly in *Practical Education*:

> [I]n the science of education, . . . the objects of every experiment are so interesting, that we cannot hold our minds indifferent to the result. . . . [T]he combined powers of affection and vanity, of partiality to his child, and to his theory, will act upon the mind of a parent, in opposition to the abstract love of justice, and the general desire to increase the wisdom and happiness of mankind. (I.v–vi).

Her goals as a novelist are, as the Advertisement included in *Belinda* makes clear, essentially the same as her aims as an educational theorist: to promote "justice . . . wisdom and happiness" rather than "folly, errour, and vice" (3). Similar epistemological considerations apply to both fields; the primary pitfall to be avoided is the inability to "hold [one's] mind indifferent" to everything but the "experiment" at hand.

### The epistemology of breastedness

Breastedness in *Belinda* provides one of the novel's rare examples of a demonstration depicting an engagement with bodily subjectivity which goes beyond the subject-object relations of observer and observed. Though characters often fail as investigators in the face of their own imaginative limitations, breastedness, as Lady Delacour deploys it, operates as a consensual domain, across which bodily subjectivity can be communicated successfully. Her rather turbulent experiences of breastfeeding and breast cancer challenge and sometimes defeat her powers of analysis. Nonetheless, Lady Delacour, of all the novel's characters, comes the closest to being a role model for the effective exchange of subjective bodily knowledge.

*Belinda*'s central issue of fact and feeling is Lady Delacour's (apparently) diseased breast.[17] In a novel with well-noted "narrative improprieties" (Wein 313), this breast provides a surprisingly consistent and pervasive theme. It instigates a rapid and all but indissoluble emotional bonding between Belinda and Lady Delacour (32–3); it permeates Helena's relationship with her mother (42, 173–4, 298–99); it helps reconcile Lady Delacour with her husband, and conquer his alcoholism (268, 279–84); and it ties Harriet Freke (55–8, 307–11) and Dr. X— (131) into a main plotline. Once the breast's diseased state has been alleviated (313–14), the rest of the novel's resolutions soon fall into place, in a near-miraculous series of chance revelations and fortuitous coincidences: Clarence's diffidence is suddenly explained in full (362–92); Virginia's long-lost father re-appears from the West Indies (392–414); Mr. Vincent is abruptly revealed to be a gambler, ending his involvement with Belinda (419–50); Virginia's lover materializes out of a portrait (464–76); and Clarence and Belinda are at last free to marry (470–72). In

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[17] The particular contexts which rendered the breast, at the time and place *Belinda* occupies, a highly topical and multivalent point of focus for interrogating "how it feels" will be dealt with in detail in the following chapter; for the moment, I will concentrate on Edgeworth's particular treatment of the breast, as an element of her fiction.

Mrs. Margaret Delacour's tart summation, "*they live . . . very happily all the rest of their days*" (477) – once the breast has been healed (Kowaleski-Wallace 127).

This mass of narrative correlations rather highlights, than explains, the role of the breast in *Belinda*, however; Edgeworth's multi-layered "aesthetic of play" (Meyers 110) applies here as elsewhere in the novel. In the first place, *Belinda* is a novel about breast cancer in which no-one has breast cancer. Even Belinda, the novel's model of prudence (Wein 302), spends the greater part of the novel mistakenly convinced that her patroness is dying from the effects of a malignant tumour, an error which provokes critic Jordana Rosenberg to characterize the novel as "the spectacle of two women being wrong together" (577). As she points out, every moral that can be hung on Lady Delacour's diseased breast – that her wit is destroying her (Rosenberg 580), that being fashionable is killing her (MacFadyen 425), or that her failure as a mother is eating her away (Kowaleski-Wallace 126) – necessarily reverses itself once Dr. X— rediagnoses her:

> [T]he novel not only cures Lady Delacour's disease, but it eliminates the possibility that Lady Delacour could ever have been diseased. . . . [I]t may be, as MacFadyen tells us, that domestic reading "corrects" "fashionable" reading – but this scenario of correction is itself corrected. (Rosenberg 583)

This is an outcome consistent with the rest of the novel's multivalent depictions, and with the text's own cautions. It should be relatively unsurprising to the reader, then, that Dr. X—'s rediagnosis is less a triumphant proof that "a world in which all have found their proper places" (Greenfield 218) has at last been re-established, than a disruptive overturning of the idea that Lady Delacour's cancer has been a clear-cut sign of anything at all.[18]

The particular set of representations involving Lady Delacour's breast provides, like the first episode of the goldfish, opportunities for observation and comparison across an acute set of bodily boundaries. Knowledge of her breast is the single most important element of its presence in the text – the issue of who knows (or can know) best its state of health, its appearance, or its productiveness. Lady Delacour's nursing experiences, for example, revolve around whose understanding of the breast prevails at any given time. The dilemma she faces is typical of her era. Many late-eighteenth-century physicians, including some zealous advocates of maternal breastfeeding, admitted that aristocratic women could not be expected to nurse their own children, because the heavy social demands incident to their station necessarily conflicted with the ready breast access young infants require. George Armstrong, for example, concedes that, though "[e]very mother whose health and strength will permit . . . ought . . . to suckle her infant" (107), there are nonetheless "some whose situation in life will not allow them to perform this duty" (100). Not all opinions were this tolerant, however; as the determining factor in whether a mother breastfed shifted from class to gender (Perry 119), aristocratic mothers came under criticism for employing wet nurses. William Alexander's *History of Women* (1779) complains that "at present, there is scarcely to be found in Europe a woman of family and fashion who will take the trouble of nursing her own child," and blames this state of affairs on noblewomen's desire to "dedicate themselves more freely to the rage of pleasure" (98). A late-eighteenth-century British noblewoman trying to decide whether or not to nurse her child thus found herself embroiled in questions of authority vs. her own lived experience.

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[18] On this topic, see Katherine Montwieler's excellent analysis of Lady Delacour's cancer (and its 'cure') as performance, in ""Reading disease: The corrupting performance of Edgeworth's *Belinda*" (*Women's Writing* 12.3 (2005)), pp. 347–68.

Edgeworth provides commentary on Lady Delacour's nursing dilemma, using the voices of other characters, but the hermeneutic of suspicion that underlies the rest of the novel is present here as well. Mrs. Delacour is incorrect for many reasons when she describes Lady Delacour's nursing choices as clear evidence that she is a "monster" (102). Her analysis predicates itself on the idea that the subjective experiences of a nursing mother are intrinsic, and that only a creature wholly not-mother can be without them:[19]

> She has no sensibility, sir – none – none. . . . I remember well her performing the part of a nurse with vast applause; and I remember, too, the *sensibility* she showed, when the child that she nursed fell a sacrifice to her dissipation. . . . [A]n unfeeling mother I cannot comprehend. That passes my powers of imagination. (103)

This opinion rapidly becomes the centre of one of the novel's spirals of representation and counter-representation. Lady Anne, with her "accurate knowledge" (166), opposes the opinion of Mrs. Delacour, that font of "a hundred mistakes" (102), and argues for a more charitable judgment on Lady Delacour. Nonetheless, her objection to Mrs. Delacour's assessment appears to recapitulate its basic premise:

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[19] Mrs. Delacour's opinion is a faithful reflection of the late eighteenth century's emergent ideology of maternal nursing. See Chapter 3 for a detailed analysis of mothers, monsters, and breastfeeding during this period.

> I cannot believe such a being to exist in the world – notwithstanding all the descriptions I have heard of it, as you say, my dear Mrs. Delacour, it passes my powers of imagination. Let us leave it in Mr. Hervey's apocryphal chapter of animals, and he will excuse us if I never admit it into true history – at least without some better evidence than I have yet heard. (103).

A failure of imagination is what is at issue here: both women exclude from their cosmologies such a creature as a nursing mother who lacks the subjective experiences they consider appropriate to maternal sensibility.[20] Whether defending Lady Delacour or condemning her, neither of these characters make their judgments taking her lived experience into account.

The reliance on authority, conventional or sentimental, which unites the opinions of the novel's best and worst judges, is a foil to Lady Delacour's far more expert and Hunterian approach. She is flexible, unpresumptuous, and astute as she negotiates her complicated nursing experiences, disastrous though some of them prove to be. If this were a case of Edgeworth literalizing observations of 'real' life, Lady Delacour would almost certainly put all of her children out to nurse, in compliance with the ubiquitous practice of her class, and the preferences of her husband. Edgeworth's decision to place Lady Delacour within a community of "friends" among whom "[i]t was the fashion at this time for fine mothers to suckle their own children" (42) is thus one of her less realistic artistic choices, though such pockets of fadism may have existed among the upper as well as the middle classes. Within this context, however, the novel is free to represent Lady Delacour's nursing choices as more than a simple set of binaries, which oppose Custom and Nature, husband and wife, or obedience and rebellion. Rather, she relies on her own experiences and observations to guide her through a terrain of conflicting possibilities.

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[20] The political and medical context surrounding the subjectivity of the nursing mother is dealt with in detail in Chapter 3; the opinions given by Lady Anne and Mrs. Delacour strongly reflect contemporary views.

The tragic oddity of her first nursing experience is not the result of a failure of imagination, but of the overwhelming importance she grants to her subjective experience when making decisions. The first child of hers that survives long enough to suckle, she chooses to nurse herself, defying class expectations, in favour of her immediate community's emphasis on maternal breastfeeding. The issue at stake, however, is not which authority on nursing she allows to dictate the 'true' nature of the maternal breast. Lady Delacour not only decides to nurse, but to persist in unsuccessful nursing with a "poor diminutive, sickly" child. The fact that she becomes "heartily sick of the business," yet continues with it until the infant dies, suggests that she believes even at the time that the "prodigious rout made about the matter . . . [the] sentiment and sympathy, and compliments and inquiries" are mainly humbug. It is her desire to avoid being "thought by [her] friends an unnatural mother," not the fear of *being* one, that motivates her (41–2); as Mrs. Delacour points out, anyone whose sensibility was genuinely engaged in the matter would have found it difficult, in Lady Delacour's case, to endorse continued breastfeeding as her child's health declined (103). Lady Delacour's knowledge of her own lived experience, and the tremendous importance she attaches to it, is, in fact, what dictates her choices. She is miserable, and, in a subtle mirroring of Lord Delacour's alcoholism, can find relief from this feeling only while "intoxicated with the idle compliments of all [her] acquaintance." She has a sympathetic pleasure in the fact that her community enjoys her company, and this, and the sense of "novelty" that initially accompanies the nursing experience, launch her into breastfeeding.

In a terrible double-bind, however, the "intoxicat[ion]" of "pleasing universally" is available to her only if she sacrifices every other aspect of her lived experience. She can "console [her]self" with the admiration of others only if she submits her subjective life to the demands of her community: "not one of my thoughts, was my own. I was obliged to find things 'charming' every hour, which tired me to death; and every day it was the same dull round of hypocrisy." Like an addict, she must continue to breastfeed, because it ensures a continued supply of the only experience she finds pleasurable: "Why did I persist . . . ? Why, my dear, because I could not stop" (41–2). The infant does not die because Lady Delacour mistakenly accepts the wrong authority's stance on the nature of maternal breastfeeding, but because the subjective experiences contingent on breastfeeding are so valuable to her, as to render other considerations, including even the life of her child, secondary.

Despite her obvious and terrible mistake, Lady Delacour provides an admirable example for the reader of someone encountering new knowledge with epistemological modesty. In spite of her deep investment in the subjective experiences maternal nursing offers, she recognizes, accepts, and acts "upon what she saw and felt" (69) during her first experiment in breastfeeding. She admits without self-justification how and why she has been the cause of her infant's death, and, when she gives birth to Helena, puts her out to nurse "immediately" (42). Of the novel's supporting characters, only Dr. X— and the Percivals credibly demonstrate anything like this kind of impartial discernment in their dealings with others. And, unlike Lady Delacour, Dr. X— and the Percivals are never called on by the narrative to encounter evidence strongly contradicting their existing beliefs. Only she combines, in her character's depiction, "an uncommon share of penetration" (419), and a wide field for exercising it.

Lady Delacour is undoubtedly better at discovering (and adapting to) new knowledge than other characters in the novel, and she is often a corrective influence on the novel's ostensible main characters. The novel's heroine, in particular, sometimes justifies Edgeworth's complaint against "the cold tameness of that stick or stone Belinda" (Harden 54) – not with the phlegm of her love-affairs, but with her obtuseness. Until Lady Delacour rudely baptizes her into a knowledge of her own ignorance ("You stare – you cannot enter into my feelings" (65)), Belinda has never "in her life . . . reasoned for herself upon what she saw and felt." Though "her understanding is suddenly roused and forced to exert itself" (69), it does not always do so to great effect. Even explicit instructions from Lady Delacour sometimes fail to make a lasting impression on her. Early in the novel, Lady Delacour accuses her of refusing to wear finery in order to please Clarence's taste:

> [Y]ou very judiciously determine, at the first hint from him, to change your dress, your manners, and your character; and thus to say to him in as plain terms as possible, ". . . I hope, sir, you like my simplicity!" Depend upon it, my dear, Clarence Hervey understands simplicity as well as you or I do. (71)

Belinda submits to her patroness's judgment for the moment, but, eight chapters later, seems to have forgotten all about it:

> As she left the room, Belinda heard Clarence Hervey repeat to Lady Delacour – "Give me a look, give me a face, / That makes simplicity a grace . . . –" he paused

> – but Belinda *recollected the remainder of the stanza* – "Such sweet neglect more taketh me / Than all th' adulteries of art, / That strike mine eyes, but not mine heart." It was observed, that Miss Portman dressed herself this day with the most perfect simplicity. (169)

Clarence is not particularly acute in his perceptions and judgments, either; in spite of an early reputation for "genius" and "gallantry" (14), he blunders through his romance with Belinda. Unable to decide, initially, whether to settle on "admiration," "dread" or "terrour" as his primary response to her company (15), he falls in love with her only to renounce his passion in favour of marriage to a penniless illiterate whom he does not love at all (391). Lady Delacour's intelligent intervention is required to unite him, at last, with Belinda (475–6).

Though she is, like almost every character in this novel, mistaken on occasion, her overall competence extends to her ability to manage and to learn from her own body's lived experience. In her own words, "[I]t is so difficult to get at facts, even about the merest trifles . . . . Actions we see, but their causes we seldom see" (172); this applies to the facts of one's own subjective experiences as well as those of others. The novel's persistent and multifaceted reversals acknowledge the difficulty of acquiring facts. In particular, they highlight the unreliability of epistemological methods which rely heavily on the body's signs as code, or on the sentimental novel as a predictable experience. Edgeworth suggests, however, that with a stance of epistemological openness and a flexible imagination, it is possible to learn from lived experience even where bodily difference is involved.

This reading of *Belinda* relies fundamentally on the particularity of "how it felt" within the novel's historical and cultural context. Edgeworth's depiction of Lady Delacour's nursing choices relies on a model of bodily subjectivity in which a mother's lived experience cannot be explained as a transhistoric universal. The novel is able to represent how it feels to nurse (or choose not to nurse) one's child as a highly variable set of negotiations, at least in part because it assumes that this experience is situated. Lady Delacour must navigate a terrain of responses; she is not simply accepting or resisting a unitary nursing experience which all breastfeeding mothers share. The room which *Belinda* finds for play in this situation relies, however, on an assumption that the experiences of a nursing mother exist and may be known. In the following chapter, I analyze Mary Wollstonecraft's authorial strategies in the face of contemporary nursing literature's contention that maternal breastfeeding is wholly instinctual. While Edgeworth chooses to interrogate, by complication, the epistemology of "how it feels" to breastfeed one's child, Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* addresses the ontology of maternal nursing experiences. By staging a coup on the self-authorizing discourse of contemporary natural histories (which strongly linked animals and women), she claims the right to define the lived experiences of nursing mothers within a feminist framework.

## A mother's feelings: Animals, women, and the nursing breast

Edgeworth's *Belinda* represents knowledge of a body's experiences as a process of interaction, observation, and analysis. Another possible model of knowledge is that one simply occupies the role of knower; this kind of prescriptive authority evades epistemological complications by associating knowledge with identity, rather than with action. Late-eighteenth-century nursing texts share, as a general characteristic, this self-authorizing stance. The nursing breast makes many appearances in eighteenth-century literature. Breastfeeding is present in novels (e.g., Richardson's *Pamela II*, 1742, Frances Sheridan's *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, 1761, and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, Or the Wrongs of Woman*, 1798), in poetry (e.g., Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*, 1663–8, William Dodd's *Moral Pastorals*, 1767, and Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, 1791), and in an "outpouring" of medical treatises (Perry 119). The presence of nursing in these texts has wide political and social implications, with writers "us[ing] breastfeeding not only as a measure of maternal virtue but also as an indicator of broader personal and class virtues" (Bowers 166). In this chapter, I will argue that out of this mass of material, medical discourse held an extremely powerful position from which to dictate not only behaviour, but also experience; in the words of Amanda Gilroy, "medical men and moralists guided women in how to act, how to feel, and how to care for their children" (18). Writers like Wollstonecraft, whose goal was to enter political discourse from a feminist stance, needed strategies in their depictions of maternal nursing which offered alternatives to the totalizing power of medical discourse.

Using a wide range of mid- and late eighteenth century nursing texts, including medical treatises, natural histories, and popular prose, as well as Wollstonecraft's *A*

*Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, my goal is to determine how this power operated at the subjective level for nursing women in this period. My strategy is to evaluate how (and what) "medical men and moralists" were teaching breastfeeding mothers "to feel." Many of the depictions in eighteenth-century nursing literature astonish me with their perspectives. Why do so many descriptions of nursing refer to animals, and how they feel? In depicting how it feels to nurse, why do authors so rarely use as evidence the reports of women who have breastfed a child? Why is so much of the period's nursing advice aimed at men, who cannot breastfeed at all? These peculiarities (and I have offered only a partial list here of the points which strike me in these texts) indicate, at the very least, that the lived experience of breastfeeding was overdetermined by a strongly deployed discourse. In late-eighteenth-century texts, in particular, the feelings of a nursing mother are generated, named, and judged before the infant first attaches to the breast. This pre-emption all but obliterates direct subjective experience, by evacuating the lived experiences of the nursing mother, and transferring them to others. This discourse, in short, operated (and operated with energy) at an ontological level.

To make this case, I will argue in the first place that the vexed problem of bodily epistemology, which Edgeworth engages wittily in *Belinda*, is an issue that late-eighteenth-century nursing literature evades almost entirely. This literature does so by employing strategies similar to those found in contemporary representations of animal subjectivity, which focus on the ontological status of a particular category of lived experience, to the practical exclusion of epistemological concerns. I will then examine in more detail the parallels between late-eighteenth-century depictions of animal and maternal bodily subjectivities, to contend that a shift in the concept of the 'natural' allowed writers to evacuate subjectivity from the maternal nursing experience, and transfer it to the lived experiences of the father and the child. Finally, I will consider the deployment of animal, mother, and breast in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), to analyze how one early feminist positioned her ideas within the prescriptive nursing literature of her time, and among its various strategies involving the subjective bodily experiences of nursing a child.

The heavy layers of ideology that lie on the eighteenth century's nursing practices (especially where maternal breastfeeding is concerned) make it unusually difficult to tease out issues of lived experience from a web of political and cultural concerns, in which "[b]reastfeeding emerges as a matter of (male) life and death, an act of terrifying female power, the sign of 'natural' maternal virtue, and the class act *par excellence*" (Bowers 161). Attempts to locate the subjective experience of nursing during this period are further complicated by the fact that these political and cultural concerns are constantly in motion over the course of the eighteenth century; breastfeeding, like maternity itself, consisted of "a moving plurality of potential behaviour always undergoing supervision, revision, and contest, constructed in particularity" (Bowers 19). Throughout the eighteenth century, the nursing breast is a large, but moving, target.

The very magnitude of the eighteenth-century's nursing literature, however, makes certain generalizations about its concepts of bodily subjectivity possible. The period's medical writings, for example, leave a vivid picture of the material contexts of nursing, especially where a nursing woman's body is concerned. The direct bodily consequences which generally accompanied eighteenth-century breastfeeding have only recently received scholarly treatment, primarily through Valerie Fildes's two groundbreaking histories of infant nutrition, but within the work of other researchers, as well.[1] Though this accumulated research is not necessarily of much help in (as Toni Bowers aptly puts it) "deciding what 'really' happened" in the lives of eighteenth-century nursing women (20), it can, by illuminating the specific medical and political contexts within which a mother breastfed an infant, shed a dim light on the shaping influences which may have exerted pressure on "how it felt" to do so.

The material conditions of maternal breastfeeding in the eighteenth century could make the experience difficult, painful, and even dangerous. Many mid-century midwives and medical practitioners believed, for example, that the early productions of the mother's breast (consisting of colostrum, a clear fluid) were either too negligible in quantity or too poor in quality to be fit for consumption by the newborn infant (Fildes, *Breasts* 81): "[t]he Milk of a Woman that is just brought to Bed, is inflam'd, thick, and corrupted; occasion'd by the Pain and Fatigue she underwent in her Travel" (*Art of Nursing* 26). Medical opinion was also all but unanimous in asserting that the neonatal body's first and most urgent requirement was to purge "all the Impurities that lie lurking in the most minute and remote Passages of the Body" (*Art of Nursing* 14). To address both of these problems, most mid-century authorities advised the mother not to nurse until at least a day had elapsed after the birth (Mauriceau 253). During this period (which one text suggests extending to "the *ninth day* after *DELIVERY*" (Maubray 334)),[2] authorities recommended purging the child, and drawing off the mother's colostrum by means of manual expression, "nipple glasses" (Fig. 2), or suckling performed by another adult, an older child, or some puppies (Rowley 15, Mauriceau 253–4, White 143–4, Wiseman 43). When maternal nursing at last began, one could expect the two main parties to be a famished baby with a weak suck, and a mother whose nipples were sore from being "drawn," and flattened from over-engorgement, making them difficult for the infant to latch on to (White 145). This combination probably rendered the initial encounter frustrating, at best – and at worst, futile.

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[1] Critic Pam Carter says of Fildes's work (*Breasts, Bottles and Babies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1986) and *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988)) that she has "greatly expanded our knowledge . . . uncovering a hidden history" (38). For a historical overview of nursing's bodily contexts over time, see Pam Carter, *Feminism, Breasts and Breast-Feeding* (NY: St. Martin's P, 1995). For information about British nursing practices in the seventeenth and early-to-mid-eighteenth centuries, see: Patricia Crawford, "The construction and experience of maternity in seventeenth-century England" (in *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England*, ed. Valerie Fildes (NY: Routledge, 1990), pp. 3–38); David Harley, "From Providence to Nature: The moral theology and godly practice of maternal breast-feeding in Stuart England" (*Bull. Hist. Med.* 69 (1995): 198–223); and Marylynn Salmon, "The cultural significance of breastfeeding and infant care in Early Modern England and America" (*J Social Hist* (1994): 247–69). For an examination of British nursing practices later in the period, see: Ruth Perry, "Colonizing the breast: Sexuality and maternity in eighteenth-century England" (in *Forbidden History: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe*, ed. John C. Fout (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992), pp. 107–137); and Joan Sherwood, "The milk factor: The ideology of breast-feeding and post-partum illnesses, 1750–1850" (*CBMH/BCHN* 10 (1993): 25–47).

This was not, however, the only difficulty a nursing mother might face. Mastodynia (an infection of the breast's milk glands) was so common among newly-delivered women that some medical texts cite it simply as a sign that the breast has begun to produce mature milk (Ball 64):

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[2] This particular authority does admit that "the *Breast* of some other clean and sound *Woman* may be given the *CHILD*, until the *Mother's Milk* be purified for its proper *Use*" – after, of course, the infant has been sufficiently dosed with some combination of almond oil, sweetened butter, salt water, powdered coral, and/or wine (Maubray 334–5).

> The most common symptoms of the milk coming are shooting pains, swelling of the parts, a feverish heat all over the body, and sometimes shiverings, with sickness at the stomach. Some have few or none of these sensations at the accession of the milk, while others suffer the most exquisite pains. (Rowley 8–9)

Continuing to nurse during the infection would be intensely painful,[3] but only consistent, thorough emptying of the breast offered a good hope for a recovery (Rowley 3–4, Wiseman 41). The mastodynia could progress into an abscess, and the abscess to an ulcer, which could eventually necessitate removal of the entire breast (Aiken 170). Few North American mothers today have any experience, or even idea, of how drastically these infections can effect a woman's health. The following account, recorded by surgeon Richard Wiseman in his "Treatise of Tumours" (1734), is worth giving in detail for its horrifyingly precise depiction of just how serious a case of mastodynia could become for an eighteenth-century sufferer:

> A young Gentlewoman, after Child-bed, being indisposed in her Health, her left Breast became diseased, and swell'd. They contented themselves with such help as those about them could afford. But after some Days it growing more painful and swelled, the Apothecary brought in his Brother, who endeavoured Suppuration[4] . . . But while he was dressing that Opening, the Fluxion[5] encreased,

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[3] I can attest to this personally.

[4] To bring "to a head . . . a boil or other eruption" (OED).

[5] Flow of a body fluid (OED).

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Figure 2: "Different forms of glasses for drawing milk from the breasts of women" (Benjamin Bell, *A System of Surgery*, facing p. 372).

and other Abscesses were raised, and from the several Apostemations[6] sinuous Ulcers were afterwards made. Thus the work became difficult. I was consulted. In the pulling out one of the Tents,[7] a thin white Matter issued out in great quantity: my Brother Chirurgeon called it Milk; but I thought it Matter,[8] and observed the Abcess to have begun deep in the Body of the Glands . . . . The method of Cure consisted in the enlarging of that Orifice where the Matter seem'd to be detain'd . . . . We began with the application of a Caustick[9] . . . by which means, in a short time we had made an easy way for the Matter . . . . As the Escar[10] separated, a *Fungus*[11] thrust forth . . . . [T]he *Fungus* encreased upon us, and raised a Swelling between that and the other Orifices. . . . [W]e seeing the *Fungus* great, and the way of extirpating it by Escaroticks slow, and fearing the ill consequences of it, I press'd with my Finger under it, and at once broke into it, and pulled it out in pieces . . . . The second Day after that, we opened it again. And by this same Method often repeated, we subdued the remainder of the *Fungus*, and raised a firm *basis*, on which we incarned.[12] (46–7)

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[6] Festering abscesses (OED).

[7] A "roll . . . of soft absorbent material . . . used to . . . keep open or distend a wound" (OED).

[8] That is, pus.

[9] A corrosive chemical, such as lye (KHO or NaOH) or quicklime (CaO) (OED).

[10] Usually "eschar": a "brown or black dry slough, resulting from the destruction of a living part" (OED).

[11] "[S]oft spungy, Flesh which grows upon wounds" (OED).

[12] Induced healing (OED).

Wiseman lists this case, ghastly as it is, as one of his medical successes. Small wonder that some women, in spite of all contemporary urging to nurse, were "only from fear . . . discouraged from doing it" (Underwood 171)

If a woman escaped mastodynia, she had still to avoid damage to her nipples while she nursed. The difficulty of keeping them dry made chapping and "cracks" a frequent complaint (Bell 372), and household manuals of the period often include recipes for treating "sore nipples" (Charles Carter 344, *Family Physician* 107–8, Fisher 88, Kettilby 71). Perforated nipple guards of various kinds (Fig. 3) were available, to help reduce the chance of further injury "from the friction of the cloathes" (Bell 375) while suffering from "[t]hese Chops and Excoriations" (Mauriceau 300). Several texts, however, mention with relative composure the possibility that a breastfeeding mother's nipples might be "wholly suck'd off" in the course of nursing a child (Mauriceau 299, Brown 7, Underwood 172, Shaw 540–42, Vaugnion 251). Judging from contemporary representations like these, one feels justified in admiring the fortitude of every nursing woman of the period.

These representations, however, do not necessarily bring us much closer to understanding how these women may have understood themselves, and their subjective bodily experience of nursing (or 'failing' to nurse) a child. The changing pattern of maternal practice in eighteenth-century nursing, however, does provide a hint as to which forces tended to have the most impact on the breastfeeding experience. The behaviour of actual women suggests that the bodily contexts of maternal breastfeeding were *not* a primary influence in determining whether they nursed their own children; mothers seem to have breastfed in response to prevailing male opinion, rather than personal physical

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Figure 3: In this engraving, Figures 2, 3, and 4 illustrate nipple guards, "which may be either of ivory, lead, or silver" (Benjamin Bell, *A System of Surgery*, facing p. 374).

concerns. Public pressure on mothers to nurse their children, for example, began to increase during the post-Reformation period, with moralists and physicians publishing attacks on wet-nursing (the widespread practice of hiring another lactating woman to nurse one's child).[13] The incidence of wet-nursing, however, seems actually to have risen over the course of the seventeenth century, to what may have been its historical peak in England (Fildes, *Breasts* 79, 99–100). Most husbands, desirous of a numerous posterity, and aware that lactation tends to suppress female fertility,[14] objected to maternal breastfeeding: "[d]uring the first half of the century, middle- and upper-strata husbands often disapproved of maternal breastfeeding and vetoed mothers' deeply felt desires to nurse their infants" (Bowers 161). In general, only those too poor to hire a wet-nurse submitted to the necessity of maternal nursing (Perry 122). Concurrently with the "mid-century boom in manuals and treatises devoted to extolling and controlling a particular version of motherhood" (Bowers 14–15), however, mothers began to nurse their own children in "a proportion . . . never equaled before or since" (Perry 123, Bowers 161, Fildes, *Wet-Nursing* 111–6). The material conditions of maternal nursing, in terms of its difficulties and health risks, underwent no significant changes during this period; women who participated in the mid-century fad for maternal breastfeeding faced the same hazards which had jeopardized earlier generations of nursing women. What had changed, however, was the amount of attention nursing received in contemporary literature.

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[13] The role of the wet-nurse as a defining Other for a professionalizing medical establishment is given extensive historical treatment in Valerie Fildes's *Breasts, Bottles and Babies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1986) and *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

[14] Even today, according to the World Health Organization, "exclusive breast-feeding . . . prevents more pregnancies worldwide than those prevented through artificial contraceptive measures" (WHO).

According to Toni Bowers, England witnessed a "mid-century boom in manuals and treatises devoted to extolling and controlling a particular version of motherhood" (14–15), which seems to have been effective in influencing fathers to permit maternal nursing. This flood of material urgently endorsed mother's milk as the only natural food for infants, with the result that "reluctant mothers were as likely to be pressured *to* breastfeed as formerly they had been forbidden *from* it" (Bowers 162, Fildes, *Wet-Nursing* 118).

Improvements in the personal health features of maternal nursing did not initiate a change in breastfeeding behavior; they followed from it. As part of the "intensifying cultural significance of motherhood" (Perry 121) in the mid-1700s, various charities established urban 'lying-in hospitals,' in which physicians and other interested authorities had access to a captive population of indigent mothers, upon whom they could enforce uniform (and often experimental) maternal behaviours. At these institutions, new techniques in breast-feeding, such as nursing the infant on the colostrum as well as on the breast's mature milk, were tested and approved (Mansey 407–8, Gregory 24–5, Fildes, *Breasts* 85–7).[15] The improved methods so developed made their way into the mainstream of medical discourse in the 1770s, when medical texts began to claim that colostrum itself is a purgative, and to recommend that maternal nursing begin as soon as the mother has recovered from the fatigue of delivery (White 56, Smith 85–6, Smellie 202–3). Insofar as this change of opinion had an impact on actual nursing practices, it undoubtedly made the initial nursing experience easier for both mother and child – but it occurred well *after* the mid-century upsurge in maternal breastfeeding. In spite of the potentially drastic negative impact nursing could have on a woman subjectively, the frustration, fear, and intense suffering that could accompany maternal breastfeeding seem to have had noticeably less effect on the behaviours of actual women than the prescriptive opinion which saturated their local environments.

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[15] One of the figures closely involved in the development of these new practices was the anatomist William Hunter, who was connected with a charitable "Lying-in-Hospital in *Brownlow-Street*" (Nelson 47–9).

If texts on nursing could have more actual impact on breastfeeding behaviour than the appalling suffering Richard Wiseman describes, then their influence must have been powerful indeed – and well worth studying for their weight in "how it felt" to breastfeed.

## Epistemology vs. ontology: Feelings in Other bodies

Mid-century nursing texts succeeded in establishing their authority over not only whether or not a woman breastfed, but what kind of subjective experience she had while doing so, by granting themselves the right to pronounce on both. They focused on ontological status ("this is how it is") and thus avoided epistemological entanglements ("here is how I know this"). The epistemology of "how it feels" is by nature deeply political. Whether or not a particular corpus of lived experience receives recognition within and beyond the body most intimately involved with its production depends largely on the power relationships involved. Power is implicated not only in the establishment and/or maintenance of a particular discourse or discourses of bodily subjectivity, but also in the ontology of the categories "body" and "subjectivity," determining not only how one knows and understands lived experiences, but whether these experiences exist at all. While Edgeworth's *Belinda* highlights (and mocks) the multi-layered difficulties involved in trying to know the bodily subjectivity of another, it does so with a presupposition, however modest, that such experience exists and is worth knowing. Whatever epistemological impediments litter the way, behaviour must be interpreted, disease diagnosed, and social relationships negotiated, by means of some mutual exchange of subjective knowledge. The fact that *Belinda* ends with its primary things and people explained, cured, and appropriately mated, suggests an underlying optimism about such exchanges. This optimism, however, seems to side-step certain underlying political issues. Bodily subjectivity is widely distributed among the novel's characters, so that even the experiences and interpretations of Juba-the-dog are available to the reader (425, 429–30), and this narrative egalitarianism ablates any need to contest the boundaries defining "how it feels"; Edgeworth can avail herself of the author's privilege to enforce subjectivity within her characters, where and how she pleases.

This is also the case, to a certain extent, in late-eighteenth-century non-fiction. Eighteenth-century representations of animals, for example, vary widely based on whether or not animal subjectivity itself is acknowledged as a possible entity. Contemporary writers' descriptions of animals generate a terrain of possible beliefs about the lived experiences of non-human creatures; these range from the proposition that animals have no feelings at all, to the suggestion that animals have sensory and emotional experiences but no self-awareness, to belief that certain animals have feelings, self-awareness, memory, and reason. Within religious discourse, for example, John Abernethy's *Discourses* (1746) strongly reject the Cartesian idea that animals lack even basic sensory perception (1.48), arguing instead that animals have sufficient sentience to demonstrate "the Creator's benignity" (2.59):

> . . . [H]e has made even this low life with a capacity for some happiness . . . . [Its] self-motions, sensations, and the following of instincts, are accompanied with a kind of gratification, so that the sensitive life itself is not dragged on with sorrow,

> nor is altogether joyless and insipid; but in its measure, partakes the bounty of kind provident nature. Of this, many species of the brutes give plain enough discoveries. . . . They sport in their manner, and play, satisfied with their portion, and as enjoying all that nature craves. (2.59–60)

In this author's view, animal cognition may be limited to "the following of instincts" only, but animals are nonetheless capable of both perception and genuine affective response. Another religious writer, however, with a similar theological point to prove, claims that apparent displays of feeling in "irrational" animals, such as their "tenderness . . . towards their young," are illusory. Such behaviours are strictly "instinctive" and temporary, "remain[ing] no longer than whilst it is absolutely necessary to the propagation and support of the species." By denying that animals have any subjective experiences beyond physical sensations, this writer is able to laud the "goodness of the Almighty" in providentially providing that "man is graciously distinguished by his make, in this, as in every other particular, and maintains his sovereignty over the creation" (A.M. 2.87).

In popular non-fiction, as well, representations of animals differ based on whether or not their subjectivity is conceded as a premise. A *Sketch* by a fashionable Bath doctor (Courtney), for example, argues that "the dignity of our nature" requires us to "place an effectual barrier between man and brute" (Adair 4), and dismisses in a waft of urbane satire "the daily instances of intelligent horses, knowing dogs, learned pigs, sagacious birds, and musical mice" (2). The "instances" this author mocks were, nonetheless, standard content in the numerous texts modeled on (and, in many cases, plagiarized from)

Buffon's *Natural History.*[16] A late-eighteenth-century spate of these books maintains, with Buffon, that, "[w]ith the powers of perception, remembrance, and consciousness, animals are . . . also endowed with certain affections, and . . . susceptible to certain emotions" (*A New System* 8). These natural histories regale their readers with vivid descriptions of the subjective life of animals, detailing the self-possession of elephants (Riley 102), the egotism of peacocks (*A New Moral System* 164), and the gratitude of lions (Jones 97). Even late-eighteenth-century farriery manuals, which one would expect to express an unanimous opinion on the lived experience of the sole animal they discuss, cannot agree on whether horses have feelings. One claims that they have an "understanding" capable of "infinite great courage," "grie[f] for the loss or deaths of their masters," and even "fore-knowledge" (A.S. 2) Another complains, with Cartesian bluntness, that the squeamishness of certain over-sensitive people is destroying the healthful practice of sticking red-hot metal pins into the shins of hunters and racers. Human feelings may be too acute to suffer such a procedure, he argues, but horses are "more intrepid patients":

> . . . [T]he preference due to the hot iron . . . has long been observed in the practice of farriery; and that it acts with superior and uncommon efficacy: and though the horror, with which the burning cautery inspires the human patient, has no doubt, been the cause of banishing it from modern surgery . . . yet it is much to be feared, since this complaisant adoption, that our successes in some obstinate cases have not been equal to our forefathers . . . . (*Pharmacopœia Hippiatrica* 67–8)[17]

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[16] First published in a full English translation in the years 1775–76.

[17] The custom of "pin-firing" horses to treat or prevent lameness persisted in England well into the twentieth century; in *The Pursuit of Love* (1945), a semi-autobiographical novel by Nancy Mitford, the narrator describes her father's groom "firing . . . a favourite horse" (16).

Widely diverging opinions on the nature of animals' lived experience seem to be typical of these representations, focusing on the ontology, rather than the epistemology, of animal experience. One will find relatively little in Buffon to instruct one on *how to tell* what a cat is feeling (he entirely omits to mention, for example, the dramatic behaviours of a frightened cat, including hissing, flattening its ears, and erecting its fur in a size display), but *what* makes up the subjective life of a cat is discussed in detail.[18]

My point in thus distinguishing between the epistemology of bodily subjectivity ("how can I know what he/she/it is feeling?") and its ontology ("does he/she/it really have feelings?") is that these categories have some value in analyzing the politics of body and self. Granting that, in absolute terms, no aspect of body exists prior to discourse (Butler, "Bodies that matter" 144), some features of lived experience are more central, politically, than others. Ontology *precedes* epistemology in the discourse of bodily subjectivity, with an efficiency that renders it all but transparent in its operations. Here is a specific example of what I mean by a "transparent operation": one late-eighteenth-century anatomist vivisects a "Hamster" and observes that "during this operation the animal seems to feel very little" (Bielby 348). Another, an expert in "Methods of Preparing and Preserving the Different Parts of the Human Body, and of Quadrupeds," says of the same practice that "Humanity revolts" at its mere "suggestion," due to the "prolong[ed] . . . sufferings" of these "little tortured objects of experiment" (Pole xxv–

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[18] Cats receive rather raw treatment in Buffon. Unlike the "tractable and courageous" dog (2.41), the cat:

> is a faithless domestic, which is only kept through necessity, in order to oppose another domestic enemy that incommodes us still more . . . they have an innate cunning, and a perverse disposition, which age increases, and which education only hides. They are naturally disposed to theft, but when well educated, they become, like all knaves, servile and flattering . . . . (2.69–70)

xxvii). In comparing these two radically different accounts of small-animal vivisection, it seems that the question of whether or not the subject of the operation feels pain is not a matter of observing and interpreting the subject's behaviour. One writer believes the animal has no feelings, and thus sees none; the other believes in some degree of animal subjectivity, and as a result, sees it clearly; the epistemological issues involved have been trumped, before the scalpel is even lifted, by the particular ontology governing the experimental environment. If one can make use of the power to establish what another body may or may not feel, further political exercises, to govern how the feelings of another may be known, become largely unnecessary.

This idea – that ontology precedes epistemology where lived experience is concerned – helps explain the political functions of certain late-eighteenth-century representations of animals. Most of the textual examples given above, for example, link their widely varying depictions of animal subjectivity with practical issues of political power, which extend into the human world. The writer who sees evidence of a divinely ordained hierarchy of creatures in the 'fact' that animals have no true subjectivity (A.M. 2.87), does so in a chapter titled, "On the Duty of Children to Parents" – humankind's "sovereignty over the creation" (2.87) mirrors "the father's authority" over his child (2.91). Similarly, the *Sketch* that places an "effectual barrier between man and brute" by denying animal subjectivity, later makes similar distinctions involving gender and class. The "barrier" between human and animal rematerializes as a boundary between the "delicate temperament" innate to the female body (20), and the "impenetrable stuff" that makes up the nerves of "the heroes and philosophers of every age" (18), and between the "genuine fruits of polite education" belonging to "ladies of rank and fashion," and the "rude and untutored nature" of "the middling and lower ranks of females" (4). The hierarchical model that confines "how it feels" to the human species also serves to naturalize political inequities among humans.

Writers who celebrate the existence of animal subjectivity, however, can make equally effective use of their ontology to support similar political views. The *Natural History* which lauds "the patience and perseverance of the *camel*; the cleanliness and temperance of the *ass*; the docility and attachment of the *dog*; the harmless ingenuity of some *birds*, and the fidelity of others" (*Beauties* iv) also assigns innate characteristics to the lived experiences of women, based solely on their gender. The text describes, for example, "[t]he strong and obvious attachment which women discover to prettiness, vivacity, variety, and beauty of all kinds" (xiii), in the same manner as it depicts foxes as "fond of honey" (45), or hyenas, "of human flesh" (47). Another *Natural History* (this one by the controversial Ebenezer Sibly)[19] grants animals not only subjectivity, but also sensibility. According to this author, sympathetic study of "the patient ox . . . the guileless sheep . . . the sportive lamb" will stimulate one's own "sensibilities of mind" to "a common interest in the gratification of inferior beings" (iv); observing the emotions and personalities of animals is, according to this writer, an exercise in sympathy. When the "inferior beings" involved are non-European humans, however, this benevolent "interest" in their "gratification" manifests itself as imperialism:

> Were Africa civilized, and could we pre-occupy the affections of the natives, and introduce gradually our religion, manners, and language, among them we should

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[19] Sibly (1751–c. 1799) was a licensed physician and a gifted mathematician, but his devotion to astrology, freemasonry, and mesmerism placed him outside the scientific mainstream (Curry).

> open a market that would fully employ our manufacturers and seamen, morally speaking, till the end of time; and, while we enriched ourselves, we should contribute to their happiness. (153)[20]

Mutual participation in "happiness" does not equate to mutual participation in the exercise of political power.

It seems as though *any* opinion on the subjectivity of animals – that they have an all-but-human experience of themselves, that they have glimmerings of feeling, that they have none at all – can be deployed as part of political discourse of marginalization based on class, gender, or 'race.' The content of a particular text's representation of animal subjectivity is less important than the mere fact that the representation demonstrates the author's right to frame the ontology of "how it feels" for the animal world. If the author is entitled to pronounce on animal subjectivity, he/she may also assumptively claim the right to legislate the subjectivity of other 'Other' bodies – women's among them. At the same time, epistemological questions as to whether these pronouncements about subjectivity could possibly be tested against lived experience fade into the background. Authoritative opinion thus trumps individual experience, and without a fair fight.

## "The tender brute": Animals, women, and maternal feeling

Late eighteenth-century nursing manuals similarly pre-empt epistemology with ontology regarding the subjective experiences of maternal breastfeeding. In some cases, they go so far as to attempt to evacuate bodily subjectivity from the mother entirely, transferring the feelings of nursing to the experiences of the husband and/or the child. If there is such a thing as a lived experience of the nursing breast, it does not exist within the breastfeeding mother. One important strategy for accomplishing this evacuation and transfer involves using concepts of the 'natural' to link nursing mothers and nursing animals. Hugh Smith's *Letters to Married Women* (1767),[21] for example, addresses its readers as follows:

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[20] Sibly goes so far as to suggest that careful cross-breeding among African native populations ("adding the pacific dispositions of their [Hottentot] mothers to the good qualities of the best Guinea blacks") could produce a labouring population so submissive that "the unnatural bonds of slavery" could be done away with, using only "these easy and natural means." He recommends the Dutch East-India Company as the best agent for carrying out this scheme (170).

> [L]et us observe those parts of the creation where instinct only can direct, and for once learn a lesson from the tender brute. Behold those animals which are familiar to us, how successful they are in bringing up their young! . . . How well and happy are the dams! What unremitting care do they take of their nurslings!
>
> Provident Nature! – and shall mankind alone distrust thy goodness? (Smith 88)

While this passage apparently invokes epistemology with its invitation to "observe," the subject of this observation is by no means a nursing animal. Instead, within a fiction of direct knowledge, the author's ontological claims are offered up to view. While this representation stresses the beauty and benefit of maternal breastfeeding, its ontology suggests that nursing occurs without much agency or even awareness on the part of the animals: the "well and happy" nursing dams are capable of experiencing some emotion, but the primary element in their subjective life is clearly "instinct." Their happiness, like their health, is the effect of an instinctual cause. Terms in this text which may seem to imply further dimensions to the animal's lived experience, such as sentiment or sympathy, are misleading.[22] The animal's "care" is a behaviour (exhibited to fictional observers), not a feeling, and her tenderness is dictated by the direct action of "Nature," not by tender emotions. The "brute" acts and is acted upon by Nature's "goodness" without knowing it. Feeling is present in a rudimentary form, but knowledge about these feelings is the province of the observer, not the animal herself, who is incapable of such knowledge, at least in this instance. It is as though the subjective experience of nursing has been turned inside-out – emptied from the mother to become available to those around her.

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[21] I class Smith's *Letters* as late-eighteenth-century texts based both on their original publication date (1767), and on the fact that they had been reprinted five times by 1792. They remained in print in American editions well into the nineteenth century. The last contemporary printing of Cadogan's *Essay*, by way of contrast, appeared in 1772.

The strategies which the *Letters* employ in their depictions of nursing mothers are very similar to those used to describe "the tender brute." The subjective experience of nursing one's own child, where it appears at all, is pictured in rather muted terms:

> . . . nature is always preferable to art; whence the brute creation succeed better than the human in preserving their own species. And the peasant, whom necessity compels to follow nature, is, in this respect, happier than his lord. Those mothers, also, who, in spite of custom, pride, or indolence, will take their little babies to

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[22] Natural histories in the school of Buffon rarely scruple to affirm sensibility in at least certain animals. Buffon himself argues that:

> . . . [T]he interior qualities are those which we esteem most in the animal; for it is in these that they differ from the automaton, it is by these they are raised above the vegetable, and made to approach nearer to ourselves . . . . The perfection of an animal, depends, then, on the perfection of sentiment; the more this is extended, the more faculties and resources the animal has, the more it exists . . . . (89)

> their breast, must have more comfort and success than those who cruelly consign them to the care of foster nurses . . . . (65–6)

The only hint this passage provides as to "how it feels" to nurse one's child lies in the phrase "comfort and success." Like the "happy" dam, the human mother does experience some feeling (i.e., "comfort"), but her "success," like the animal's "care," is rather the work of "Nature" than the result of individual agency exercised. The mothers who "take their little babies to their breast" are primarily notable for the lived experiences which they lack or avoid – the action to which the author urges them is not so much to nurse, as to re-create within themselves that drive to nurse which "brute creation" experiences by means of instinct, and "the peasant," through compulsion. It is worth noting here that both "brute" and "peasant" are not presented as exclusively female; the words "creation" and "species" imply an inclusivity that extends beyond female animals only, and the "peasant," like "his lord," is exclusively male. The use of a masculine possessive pronoun here is surprising, suggesting that the lived experience of nursing can exclude the mother entirely. Knowledge about the nursing experience, too, belongs to observers, and not to the nursing mother herself. The *Letters*' description of breastfeeding continues: "that the task itself is a pleasure, the fondness of nurses towards children at the breast fully proves; and that it is an indispensable duty, the feelings of human nature evidently proclaim" (98). I would argue that here "the fondness of nurses," like the gratitude of lions, is attributed *to* their subjectivity rather than communicated *from* it. Knowledge of the lived experiences of a nursing mother is "fully" and "evidently" available without the mother's report, simply by watching a wet-nurse, or by consulting one's own "feelings" in the case. There is little room in this construction to accommodate the idea that a nursing mother might have her own exclusive knowledge of "how it feels" to breastfeed one's child.

The *Letters*' comparison of nursing mother and nursing brute, based on their similarity as representatives of "Nature," is not uncommon in late-eighteenth-century depictions of maternity. In this, late-eighteenth-century nursing texts differ significantly from mid-century nursing texts. Between the mass of material on nursing and childcare published in the early and mid-1700s, and similar publications from later in the century, there is an important difference in how the lived experience of maternal nursing is represented. Certainly, strong associations linking maternal nursing and "Nature" can be traced throughout the literature of the entire period (Carter 35, Jordanova 34, 167–69). William Cadogan's "extremely influential" (Perry 125) *Essay on Nursing* (1748), for example, maintains that "when a Child sucks its own Mother, . . . Nature has provided it with such wholesome and suitable Nourishment . . . it can hardly go amiss" (14), and later writers on the subject follow suit with their own invocations of the natural: William Rowley (1772) claims that "[i]t is certainly most natural for every mother to suckle her infant" (11); William Moss (1781) states that "[t]here can be no doubt that the mother's milk is the only sustenance nature has designed for an infant at the time of his birth" (65); and *Cautions to Women* (1798) tells its readers that "Nature begins to prepare a woman for the office of suckling, as soon as she is pregnant" (Jackson 125). Toni Bowers argues convincingly that this relative continuity among mid- to late-eighteenth-century representations of maternal nursing extends still further, into ideologies of English motherhood "codified at least a generation earlier" in seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century conduct books (14–5). Within this continuity, however, Bowers is able to locate change; "there are degrees of historical difference," she claims, even though sustained "attention to the maternal role in infant feeding" can be traced through more than a century (15, 19). I am invoking a similar claim here, to argue that, despite consistent depictions of the nursing mother as natural throughout the eighteenth century, maternal breastfeeding as lived experience had to undergo substantial changes in order to sustain the 'natural' comparison of nursing women and "tender brutes" which features in late-eighteenth-century depictions. In the same way that late-eighteenth-century representations of animal subjectivity avoided epistemological questions of *how to know* what animals feel, with ontological assertions about *what* animals feel, late-eighteenth-century representations of "how it feels" to nurse one's own child pre-empt the breastfeeding mother's own bodily experiences, with claims about what these experiences must naturally be, in order to exist at all.

Changes in the ontological status of maternal breastfeeding extend beyond nursing manuals into other aspects of late-eighteenth-century science. The nursing breast played a role, for example, in helping to generate increasingly dense linkages between nature and gender (Schiebinger 70–4). Though seventeenth-century conduct books, mid-eighteenth-century nursing manuals, and late-eighteenth-century natural histories generally concur that maternal nursing is "what Nature directs" (Cadogan 13), "Nature" itself, as Ludmilla Jordanova documents, has a history of conceptual "instability" during this period, in which "[w]omen and the feminine seem to have been peculiarly implicated" (34–5). In particular, the nursing breast, by the late eighteenth century, occupied a novel position as an organizing element within "Nature." Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (1735) was the first publication to suggest that female lactation, rather than fourfootedness, was a defining characteristic within the class of animals Aristotle had labeled *quadrapedia*, but which Linnaeus re-categorized as "*mammalia*" (Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones* 25). This term, according to science historian Londa Schiebinger, overlooks the fact that lactation is neither unique to nor universal among so-called mammals, but nonetheless the category "mammal" gained widespread acceptance as the eighteenth century progressed (70–4). The Linnaean classification system was attacked in its early phases (by critics including, notably, Buffon), but the famous 10th edition of the *Systema* (1758) was widely read in England (Smellie, *Philosophy* 54–5), and by 1789, William Cullen could refer confidently to "the six classes of Mammalia, Aves, Pisces, Amphibia, Insecta, and Vermes; into which naturalists have now agreed to divide the whole subjects of the animal kingdom" (304). The normalization of the category "mammal" also normalized a strong association between nursing women and animals: "a female characteristic (the lactating mamma) ties humans to brutes . . . . Linnaeus's term mammalia . . . emphasiz[ed] how natural it was for females – both human and nonhuman – to suckle and rear their own children" (Schiebinger 55, 74).[23] Simultaneously, as Mary Jacobus notes, contemporary nursing texts endorsed a vegetarian diet for breastfeeding women, underlining the idea that the maternal breast belongs to certain varieties of female animal in common, rather than to women (59).[24] Cullen, for example, maintains:

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[23] The complex of ideas linking nature, animals, women, and breastfeeding had important implications for England's emergent colonialism; maternal suckling practices (in particular, retrograde nursing) and the morphology of the breast were employed in the Othering of non-European populations. For more information, see Jennifer L. Morgan, "'‘Some could suckle over their shoulder': Male travelers, female bodies, and the gendering of racial ideology, 1500–1770" (*William and Mary Q* 54.1 (January 1997)), pp. 167–92, and, on the more general role maternal ideology played in colonization, Felicity A. Nussbaum, "'Savage' mothers: Narratives of maternity in the mid-eighteenth century" (*Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991–2)), pp. 123–51.

> That the taking in of vegetable aliment is absolutely necessary to produce such milk as we commonly find in the breasts of women, we learn very clearly from Dr. YOUNG's experiments upon bitches. . . . [T]hese experiments plainly show that in animals, such as women, using a promiscuous diet, the state of the milk produced will be very much more acescent . . . . (326)

The difference between the depiction of a nursing mother, in 1748, as a "Woman that can prevail upon herself to give up a little of the Beauty of her Breast to feed her Offspring" (Cadogan 24), and, in 1767, as someone included in the category "animals, such as women," is, I would argue, historically significant.

The kind of instruction offered in mid-century nursing manuals relies on an idea of nature as a set of orderly phenomena. Nursing, in this view, is like gravity: a uniform natural phenomenon operating according to universal certain laws, which a reasonable parent will refrain from violating. The logic of nursing, rather than the feeling of nursing, was of primary importance in making the case for maternal breastfeeding. Mid-century experts advocated mother's milk as infant food, for example, based on chemical and physiological arguments; though each woman's physiology was unique, the subjective experience of any particular mother was all but irrelevant. Breast milk had become the subject of detailed research after the publication of William Harvey's *De Motu Cordis et Sanguinis* in 1628. Physiological ideas inherited from classical medicine maintained that the breasts converted blood (diverted from the now-empty womb) directly into milk – a belief supported by the fact that breastfeeding tends to suppress menstruation (Lamotte 128, Laqueur 105). Harvey's account of the circulation of the blood substantially weakened the credibility of these traditional beliefs about breastmilk, opening a new field for investigation. By the middle of the eighteenth century, most natural philosophers had come to believe instead that breastmilk was made of chyle ("white milky fluid formed by the action of the pancreatic juice and the bile on the chyme, and contained in the lymphatics of the intestines, which are hence called *lacteals*" (OED)) (Lamotte 128–29, Mauriceau 289–90, Astruc 423–24). This refinement of the blood-to-milk model, into a chyle-to-milk mechanism, allowed Enlightenment physiology to retain the idea that each mother's milk was, like her infant, irreplaceably unique (Sherwood 29–30, Sharp 217):

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[24] Jacobus makes this comment based on a reading of Rousseau's *Émile*, and in the context of French nursing literature. Cullen, however, was not the only British writer to endorse in English the vegetarianism Rousseau advocated in French; see, for example, Nicolas Lémery's *New Curiosities*, p. 212. As Valerie Fildes points out, vegetarianism, as it was practiced at this time, subjected the breastfeeding mother to additional dangers; malnutrition (particularly anemia) was known to be a chronic health risk for nursing women in this period (*Wet Nursing* 101–3).

> [H]er *MILK* . . . is of a nearer *Affinity* with the Nature of her *BABE*, than the *MILK* of any *other strange Woman* whatsoever; which can differ no less from the *Maternal Milk*, that the own *Mother*, and the *other* . . . . (Maubray 329)

Any other food in the infant diet, therefore, was a dangerous innovation of "Art," and not the way of nature (Cadogan 13).

The 'naturalness' of maternal breastfeeding, however, did not mean that mothers were the persons best-equipped to initiate and supervise nursing. On the contrary, the 'fact' that maternal nursing signified the natural meant that only well-trained natural philosophers were qualified to dictate when and how breastfeeding should take place.

Cadogan's *Essay on Nursing* (1748) explicitly excludes, not only the mother, but women as a class, from the "Management" of nursing, based on their lack of "Philosophic Knowledge":

> In my Opinion, this Business has been too long fatally left to the Management of Women, who cannot be supposed to have proper Knowledge to fit them for such a Task, notwithstanding they look upon it to be their own Province. What I mean, is a Philosophic Knowledge of Nature, to be acquir'd only by learned Observation and Experience, and which therefore the Unlearned must be incapable of. (Cadogan 3)

Mothers required surveillance by and guidance from men in order to breastfeed "within the Limits of Nature" (Cadogan 14), by which he meant, in conformity to current mechanistic views of what was natural. He was not alone in this opinion; mid-century medical authorities seem to agree that some form of male oversight – involving a physician, a husband, or even a father – is a necessary element in enforcing the laws of nature, as they apply to maternal breastfeeding (Sussman 86–9). One writer, for example, advises his readers "to consult proper Judges, and always where it is in their Power, be determined by their Physician" (Nelson 56) whenever "a Doubt arises" as to exactly what steps should by taken by the nursing mother. Another employs *occupatio* to emphasize the uniformity of "learned" opinion on the subject of maternal nursing: "[i]t is unnecessary here to repeat what enlightened philosophers and most learned doctors have been so long recommending with solid reasoning based on the will of nature, that is, the mother must nurse her own infants . . ." (qtd. Sherwood 32). Breastfeeding was natural, but it was a matter to be handled by "enlightened" (male) experts; it could not be trusted to the "Unlearned" mother.

Maternal subjectivity plays a relatively small role in this period's depictions of the unnatural (i.e., non-nursing) mother. Mid-century texts differ somewhat in their explanations as to why some healthy mothers do not breastfeed – or, to use the loaded language typical of these texts, why some women "deny their Children the Food that *Nature* has appointed for 'em" (Dionis 363). Fildes notes that mid-century texts all but ignore infant welfare as a potential incentive to maternal breast-feeding; the mother, not the child, is their primary focus (*Breasts* 115). These texts also, as a rule, dismiss the manifest health risks of maternal nursing as sufficient cause for employing a wet-nurse; the discomforts and dangers of breastfeeding are either minimized ("multitudes pretend weakness when they have no cause for it" (Sharp 212)), or denied outright ("many Women would mend their Health by it" (Nelson 53)). Authors focus instead on the mother's unruliness in the face of the natural order; in the words of one author, "she acts in opposition both to the Will of the Creator, and an establish'd Providence or Order of things" (Dionis 364). The root of this "opposition" is variously identified as indifference (Sharp 212), personal vanity (Cadogan 24), class snobbery (Nelson 45–6), carelessness (*Art of Nursing* 24), or outright "barbarity" (Dionis 409). Whichever 'cause' a text chooses to target, however, its assignment of blame does not usually include the mother's subjective life. Particular lived experiences – such as fear that one may not be able to nurse successfully, or unwillingness to risk physical harm – are not at issue; innate moral flaws (of whatever kind) are what produce the unnatural mother's transgression against "what Nature directs" (Cadogan 13).

If a mother submits, however, to better-informed authorities by nursing her child in accordance with the "Order of things," mid-century nursing manuals promise her a unique and exquisite subjective experience as a result. Some texts wax almost rhapsodical on the lived experience of nursing "within the Limits of Nature," promising "a Pleasure and Satisfaction not to be conceiv'd" (*Art of Nursing* 24–5). One author goes so far as to include an erotic element within this extraordinary "Pleasure" – a mixture of the erotic and the maternal which would soon be extinguished in the social construction of "the asexual mother" (Perry 112): "there is an inexpressible Pleasure in giving Suck, which none but Mothers know . . . the Sensation itself is said to be mighty pleasing" (Nelson 44). The conditional or passive constructions these passages use to frame their guarantees, however, highlight the epistemological difficulties involved in trying to assign a specific lived experience to another body, where bodily difference itself creates an exclusive subjective knowledge. No matter how much "learned Observation and Experience" a man might have, he cannot experience first-hand "how it feels" to nurse one's own child.[25] Epistemological questions necessarily insert themselves when a non-mother tries to dictate the nature of a lived experience "which none but Mothers know" – the knowledge of which is, in any case, "inexpressible." In spite of the fact that they represent mothers as too ignorant to be trusted with the management of their own breastfeeding, mid-century nursing texts are nonetheless driven (by epistemological necessity) to appeal to the expertise of mothers when the subjective experience of nursing is at issue. Generally, they do not do so gracefully; authors hedge their bets with some form of equivocation: "by *most* mothers who have tried it, has been accounted a pleasant task" (Dionis 394); "[a]ll Mothers . . . have experienc'd it, *whose Minds are temper'd with natural Affection*" (Nelson 44); and "*were it rightly managed*, there would be much Pleasure in it" (Cadogan 24) [all italics mine]. By venturing into the sphere of the nursing mother's lived experience, mid-century nursing texts lose some of their advantage over her.

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[25] Anecdotes of male lactation (usually involving a monk or a sailor) did persist, however, into the first half of the eighteenth century (Laqueur 36, 106, 151).

Late-century nursing texts remove this problem by removing the subjective experience of nursing from the breastfeeding mother. By the end of the 1700s, when vitalist models of nature had filtered into scientific and popular literature, depictions of maternal nursing as a logical part of an orderly universe were overshadowed by less mechanistic representations. Surprisingly, the very qualities which Cadogan uses to endorse male authority over maternal breastfeeding appear as obstacles in the path of nature's processes, in these later depictions:

> Nature herself points it out: all the nobler part of the irrational creation is qualified for it, and by instinct it obeys – the human race alone, possessed of nobler powers, and rational discernment, perverts those faculties to evade its dictates, and to invent excuses for refusing its claims. (Underwood 169)

In this description of maternal nursing, "nobler powers, and rational discernment" can actually prevent nature from functioning as it should. "Reason and Sense" (Cadogan 24), instead of providing the credentials necessary to pronounce upon nature's ways, are, in this new model of breastfeeding, the very "faculties" which allow the "opposition" to nature's dictates which earlier authorities had deplored (Dionis 364).

With its focus on systems, rather than structures (Duchesneau 259–60, Bynum 446–7), vitalism shifted the ground upon which prescriptive advocacy of maternal nursing rested. By the late eighteenth century, maternal breastfeeding was not necessarily an index to a larger "Order of things" (Dionis 364). Instead, it was an organic process involving all mammals:

> How Provident is Nature in all her works! How wonderfully indulgent to man, and other helpless animals, in their first state of existence, by thus enabling the mother to feed her young with nourishment drawn from her own body . . . ! This gracious bounty is abused only by man, the most intelligent of earthly beings; whose misuse of reason leads him astray, whilst humble instinct directs all other parts of the creation aright. (Smith 64–5)

Specious over-thinking by mechanists, not a lack of "proper Knowledge" (Cadogan 3), is the main obstacle to maternal nursing identified in late-eighteenth-century nursing texts.[26] These authorities fulminate against "artificial misconduct" (Grigg 210), "mistaken views" (Hamilton 381), and "unnatural practices" (Smellie 202),[27] but their target is not, as in earlier nursing literature, the moral defects of an 'unnatural' mother.[28] Instead, the "bigoted maxims and opinions" (Smith 101) of mechanistic science constitute the villain of the piece. Thomas Denman, for example, in his *Introduction to the Practice of Midwifery* (1788), decries the double-bind in which systematized medicine places the newly-delivered mother:

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[26] This is not to say that mechanistic representations of the nursing breast disappeared altogether from nursing literature in the late eighteenth century. As critic Simon Richter points out, the history of the breast in the eighteenth century tends to include peculiar atavisms and co-existing contradictions. See Simon Richter, "Wet-nursing, onanism, and the breast in eighteenth-century Germany" (*J Hist Sexuality* 7.1 (1996)), pp. 1–22. The many permutations and editions of *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, for example, maintained the principles of Galenic medicine with regard to breastfeeding, into the end in the nineteenth century.

[27] This refers to William Smellie (1740–1795), translator of Buffon and editor of the first *Encyclopædia Britannica*, not William Smellie (1697–1763), the famous Scottish obstetrician.

> It is remarkable that the different and opposite modes of treatment have been enjoined to women in childbed, universally, without any discrimination . . . . General as the regulations were, all that was supposed necessary to be done, was to follow one or other of those injunctions implicitly, and whenever a disease arose, it was attributed, often erroneously, and sometimes very unjustly, to some irregularity or deviation from these. (468)

Mechanistic science prescribes to the mother based on general 'laws,' without observing or acknowledging her particularity. If the prescription fails, however, it is her particularity (or those of her attendants) in "deviati[ng]" which mechanistic science blames. These prescriptions were, many authors argued, actually creating disease with their preference for universal models, rather than specific observations. When maternal behaviour is governed by "arbitrary rules, the result of false science, instead of patient experience," Michael Underwood warns solemnly in his *Treatise on the Diseases of Children* (1789), "confusion and disease must be the unavoidable consequence. –

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[28] Midwives and wetnurses were also popular scapegoats in mid-century nursing literature. By the end of the 1700s, however, the number of published attacks upon them had substantially decreased, as well (Fife 185–86, Fildes, *Breasts* 168, 182).

Awakened by these, man is loudly called upon to return to the simplicity of nature, and the result of dispassionate observation" (180–82).

Underwood's appeal for a "return to the simplicity of nature" is a primary theme of late-eighteenth-century nursing literature, and animals are repeatedly held up as the gold standard for maternal nursing behaviour in this respect. A popular health manual by George Wallis (*The Art of Preventing Diseases* (1793)), for example, urges its readers to observe and imitate animal behaviour for the sake of their children's health: "she [nature] delights in simplicity alone. View but the brute creation, and those of the feathered race--see what occurs in them; examine what method they, in rearing their young, instinctively adopt, and mark their success" (169). *Letters to Married Women* gives the same advice directly to potential mothers themselves:

> How are other animals supported? Nature, in no one part of the creation, is so imperfect, as to be indebted to the wisdom of man to rectify her works. . . . Follow, my dear ladies . . . and where there are an hundred accidents now that happen to mothers, in consequence of milk fevers, and to children, in consequence of being denied the breast, you will rarely find one. (88–9)

This kind of appeal to the 'natural,' and therefore correct, nursing practices of animals was popular enough even to undermine the authority of medicine itself. Though experiments at lying-in hospitals were the actual source of the new practice of "early nursing," late-century nursing texts sometimes make it seem as though the idea came from studies of animals, not women: "this method, however unusual with some, is the most agreeable to nature, and to observations on the irrational species, who in many things are the very best guides we can follow" (Underwood 214).[29] The animal, in its "natural simplicity," is the true expert on maternal nursing.

This "simplicity," however, tends to include nursing animals and nursing mothers in a single category. Milk was the "universal aliment" (Gentlemen 18), and specific distinctions among lactating creatures seemed to have relatively little importance.[30] This was generally the case even where the subjective experience of nursing was involved. It was conceivable that suckling creatures (women included) might experience some kind of sensation while they nursed, but such feelings (for example, the "pleasant sensations . . . excited by the action of sucking" or the relief of reducing "too great a quantity of milk") played little or no role in explaining nursing behaviour. They were "only effects, and not original causes" (Mansey 405), and, in any case, existed "abstractedly from mental feelings or reflexion" (Polwhele 118).[31] Late-century nursing manuals argue that human mothers, like their animal counterparts, do not nurse by choice, but by instinct –

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[29] Underwood credits this insight to John Gregory's *Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man with Those of the Animal World* (1765).

[30] Physicians recommended women's milk, for example, as they would any other kind. A typical "strengthening" medicine of the period consists of "Ass's, Goat's, or Woman's Milk with the Juice of *River-cresses*" (Brookes 266). Late-century *materia medica* also included breastmilk in preparations for curing herpes ("tetters") (Cruso 118), consumption (*Family Guide* 76, Leake 314), phthisis (Reid 279), and eye infections (*Compleat Herbal* 149) – including those of horses (Reeves 175). Some of these texts advise the (human) patient to suck the milk directly from a wet-nurse.

[31] The author of this quotation is the same Richard Polwhele who would later write *The Unsex'd Females* (1798). This passage goes on to suggest that the unreasoning nature of the maternal nursing experience "may be an argument in favor of it, sufficient to recommend the experiment to those voluptuous females who have seldom exercised either their sensibility or their reason" (118).

unless some external force interferes, and "influence[s] the mother to act contrary to the laws of nature" (Cruttwell 8). The author *The History of Women* (1779), in his discussion of breastfeeding, claims that the instinctive nature of maternal nursing is actually *more* noticeable among women than among animals:

> A little attention to the nature and œconomy of the brute animals will convince us, that the care of their young is an innate principle, and not the effect of reasoning; but we shall be still more convinced of this, if we attentively consider the females of the human genus . . . . (Alexander 92)

Naturalist William Smellie went so far as to remove volition from breastfeeding altogether, arguing that the "innate Principle" identified in the *History* both initiates and enforces maternal nursing:

> Nature has unquestionably attached pleasure to all the necessary functions of animals. But this pleasure cannot be considered as the original cause of any particular action; for the experiment must be made before the animal can discover whether the result is to be agreeable or disagreeable. The truth is, that Nature has bestowed on the minds of all animated creatures a number of laws or instincts perfectly accommodated to the species, and which irresistibly compel them to perform certain actions. (277)

The mother's subjective experiences, "agreeable or disagreeable," are irrelevant to the inexorable function of instinct.

If mothers were "irresistibly compel[led]" to suckle their young, then male experts did not need to dictate and enforce the laws of nature, as these related to breastfeeding. Maternal nursing became less a matter of following rules, than of what kind of creature a particular mother was. While late-eighteenth-century authorities maintained that being a mother made a woman breastfeed, this period's nursing literature seems to demonstrate that, on the contrary, breastfeeding made a woman a mother. Women who did not nurse their babies were monsters – "half mothers" (Hamilton 381), "preposterous" aberrations (Thornton 235), whose "strange perversion" (Smith 59) could be explained only as some kind of congenital blight. *Essays Addressed to Young Married Women* expresses pity for any creature so afflicted:

> I consider such a person as one who has been unfortunately born deaf or blind; that is, in a state of deprivation of some of those faculties which Providence has been graciously pleased to render inherent in our nature, in its perfect formation. That every species of animals have sometimes produced monsters, is certain; but, by the goodness of Providence, they are few in number, when compared with the happy multitudes who are perfect in their several orders of existence. (96–8)[32]

While the mid-century ontology of maternal nursing focused on defining its structures (chemical, physiological, and so on), this new ontological strategy was systemic. In much the same way that, during this period, the prison began to be the penitentiary (Foucault 200–9, 227–8), the pressure to nurse was transferred from external surveillance to the ontological categorization of the individual involved. In this formulation, it was possible for the maternal experience of nursing to be wholly divorced from its public practice. Since the subjective experiences of mothers were only tangentially involved in breastfeeding, late-century nursing literature encourages its readers – especially women –

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[32] This text also claims proudly that such "monsters" are especially rare – and especially detested – in England (98).

to turn their attention instead to the subjective experiences of the husband and the infant involved.[33]

The evacuation of female bodily subjectivity from maternal nursing did not prevent authorities from depicting it as having intense subjective importance. Late-century nursing literature only relocates "how it feels" to breastfeed – it does not obliterate it. The nursing mother can, like an animal, produce sentimental experiences which she does not share; though her body and her instinctive drives permit and produce maternal nursing, the lived experience of this nursing exists primarily in the subjectivities of others. The father, in particular, becomes a participant in a bodily experience of maternal breastfeeding, which late-century literature then depicts in heightened terms. In Cadogan's mid-century depiction, the watchful husband involves himself in the nursing experience in the same way that someone might play with a pretty "Rattle," or take an horticultural interest in "a Shrub or a Flower" (24). By the end of the century, nursing literature alters this relatively detached involvement into something more personal, which "recalls a thousand delicate sensations to a generous mind" (Smith 77). The "husbandly adoration of maternal breastfeeding" (Perry 133), as well as locating the "delicate sensations" of nursing within the father's subjectivity, permits him (in a limited way) to colonize the subjectivity of his child. Representations which highlight the sentimental force of maternal breastfeeding's effects on the father tend also to mark the infant's body with the father's identity. In *Letters to Married Women*, for example, the tableau of maternal nursing reaches its peak of sensibility when it features the husband "fondly trac[ing] his own lineaments in the darling boy" (Smith 78). Another version of this scene emphasizes that both mother and child supply enjoyment to the father, though the qualities that provoke this enjoyment seem to exist only as a part of his viewing experience:

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[33] In the texts I have studied, there is no reference to the possibility that "father" and "husband" might not be synonymous terms.

> . . . most pleasing to the lover's eyes
> Who views in her each gentleness and grace,
> And sees himself reflected in his race. (*Semi-Globes* 8)

Though a male observer is still present in this late-century formulation of maternal breastfeeding, his role is no longer regulatory; his surveillance is for his own benefit, in the sense that it enriches his subjective life. How it feels to breastfeed is significant, because the father feels it.

The father's lived experience in his regard is, paradoxically, also of crucial importance to the breastfeeding mother. By persistently assuring women that nursing their children will strengthen the matrimonial bond, these texts imply that a mother who does not breastfeed risks losing her husband's regard. Maternal nursing, on the other hand, "will more firmly rivet the pleasing fetters of love," and ensure that the wife remains "to her husband, the most exquisitely enchanting object upon earth" (Smith 78–9). *Letters to Married Women* urges its female readers to

> become still more lovely in the sight of men! Believe it not, when it is insinuated that your bosoms are less charming, for having a dear little cherub at your breast. . . . perhaps [the husband] drops a sympathetic tear in recollecting the painful throes of the mother . . . . His love, tenderness, and gratitude, being thus engaged – with what raptures must he behold her . . . . (77)

The sentimental potential of this scene is activated through the lived experiences of the husband who "beholds" it. The mother nurses, but the father feels – and authenticates these feelings with signs of a potent sensibility: "delicate sensations," "raptures," and the all-but-indispensable "sympathetic tear." The nursing behavior which, for a woman, is empty of "mental feelings or reflexion" (Polwhele 118), is for the watching father an intensification of subjective life.

Depictions of the father's "raptures" over the maternal breast could extend into contemporary discourse of the erotic. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the maternal and erotic aspects of breastedness normally excluded each other (Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones* 25). The power of the father's subjective nursing experience, however, could even re-sexualize the maternal breast. One remarkable document, a poem entitled *The Semi-Globes, or Electrical Orbs* (1777), begins as comic pornography, referring to a series of similar poems comparing electrical eels to penises.[34] *The Semi-Globes* purports to have discovered "that the true *Electricity of Nature*, actually resides in the ELECTRIC ORBS" – viz., the breasts – and goes on to mingle personal satires and salacious descriptions without much further reference to natural philosophy. In its last two pages, however, the poem turns its attention to the maternal breast, praising it above all others:

> . . . Nor let libertines reprove
> This gentlest task of all-sustaining love,
> Or deem that bosom less to be admir'd,

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[34] See, for example, *The Electrical Eel: Or Gymnotus Electricus*, *The Inamorato: Addressed to the Author of The Electrical Eel, by a Lady*, and *The Old Serpent's Reply to the Electrical Eel*, all published in London in 1777. The genre revived briefly in 1779, with the publication of *An Elegy on the Lamented Death of the Electrical Eel, or Gymnotus Electricus*. I have found no other specimens featuring "orbs" instead of eels.

> Which with great Nature's earnest zeal inspir'd,
>
> Nurture the babe . . .
>
> Distended then these snowy orbs arise,
>
> And then most pleasing to the lover's eyes . . . .
>
> Let the cold Apathist, unmov'd behold
>
> These swelling beauties on the view unfold . . .
>
> For *me*, this lovely theme my heart shall warm!
>
> The breast that *nurtures*, shall for ever *charm*. (7–8)

The basic elements of the evacuation and transfer of the maternal nursing experience are all present in this depiction: the mother's "zeal" is laid to the credit of "great Nature," while the "gentleness and grace" of breastfeeding are transferred into the experiences of the observing father. The sentimental intensity of the father's experience, however, is here heightened into an erotic spectacle which includes other observers: "the libertine," "the cold Apathist," and the speaker as well. When the lived experience of maternal nursing is relocated to the father's subjectivity, its potentials increase exponentially.

The infant's bodily experiences of suckling are also represented as having importance, both in their own right and in their subsequent effects. In the same way that the transfer of nursing subjectivity to the father intensified its focus and expanded its scope, its transfer to the child opens political and cultural possibilities for breastfeeding which were not present when its experience remained primarily with the mother. The lived experiences of the suckling newborn receive, for example, the kind of detailed textual attention which the mother's are rarely granted in late-century nursing literature:

> [I]ts sense of perceiving *warmth* is first agreeably affected; next its sense of *smell* is delighted with the odour of the milk; then its *taste* is gratified by the flavour of it; afterwards the appetites of *hunger* and of *thirst* afford pleasure by the possession of their objects . . . . (Mansey 233–4)

Unlike the mother's pleasures, the infant's carefully analyzed delights and gratifications are represented as having a palpable impact on family relations. The subjective experiences of the nursing infant are the basis for its subsequent interactions with other family members; they promote "the sweet growth of filial and fraternal love, on which alone the other virtues can be ingrafted in the young heart" (Heron xi). Withholding the gratifications of the maternal breast, on the other hand, can be disastrous. At the very least, mothers who do not nurse can expect their adult child to "forget all duty and affection towards them" (Smith 76) as a result. The harm done can also extend beyond the family, into the State; if children cannot suckle their mothers, this is a sign that the nation as a whole has "degenerated into vice" (Alexander 96).[35] Authors point to Rome as an example of how civilizations in decline ignore the nursing infant's subjective experiences, in their own pursuit of gratification:

> [T]he Romans . . . as they became more alive to the feelings of luxury, and less to those of nature, . . . copied [Greece] in giving their infants to be suckled and taken care of by slaves and hired nurses, while they themselves rioted in all the pomp

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[35] For a detailed study of how maternal breastfeeding served the British state (and in particular, the needs of its expanding colonialism), see Ruth Perry's "Colonizing the breast: Sexuality and maternity in eighteenth-century England" (*Forbidden History: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe*, ed. John C. Fout (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992)), pp. 107–37.

> and extravagance of the richest and most extravagant city in the world. (Alexander 97)

Individual virtue, family function, and national well-being all affected by the infant's enjoyments at maternal breast.

These enjoyments, like the father's, are sometimes depicted as sexual, which highlights their intensity and significance. Though not explicit, the following description demonstrates how the infant's subjective experiences while suckling can be made to carry a heavy erotic charge:

> [D]elighted by the softness and smoothness of the milky fountain, the innocent embraces with its hands, presses with its lips, and watches with its eyes. Satisfied, it smiles at the enjoyment of such a variety of pleasures. It feels an animal attraction, which is love; a sensation, when the object is present, a desire, when it is absent . . . . (Mansey 234)

Late-eighteenth-century nursing texts were, I would argue, more effectively deployed, in terms of their political function, than mid-century literature of the same kind. While both rely on ontological privilege as a basis for defining the maternal nursing experience, this privilege is harder to assail in its later representations. In these, the breastfeeding mother does not appeal to her own subjective experiences, even to claim, as she was previously permitted to, "a pleasing consciousness that [she has] obey'd the Laws of Nature" (Nelson 62). While the intensity and significance of the way the father and the infant feel during maternal nursing increases, the mother's feelings are reduced to instinctual drives. If a woman's experience of the maternal breast extended beyond instinct, late-century nursing texts depict this as a trivial occurrence, not a potential field for forming a mutual ontogenic structural coupling. Those who wished, like Wollstonecraft, to engage the nursing breast as part of a consensual domain, were thus forced to do so within a discourse that left very little room for maneuver, where women's lived experience was concerned.

## Capturing the ontological high ground: Wollstonecraft's nursing mothers

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), with its repeated references to nursing (291), is enmeshed in the same political pressures that powerfully shaped the lived experience of maternal breastfeeding, and the same changes which operated on and through late-eighteenth-century depictions of the subjectivity of the nursing mother. Wollstonecraft's representations of the body in general are currently under debate among feminist literary critics, and seem to provoke a broad range of response, from many sources. She is (and always has been) a rather unsatisfactory feminist foremother, if what one looks for in an ancestor is her ability to promote solidarity and a joint sense of mission. Wollstonecraft seems to nurture paradox and contradiction, even while she inspires; her life and works are, in the words of Barbara Taylor, "designed to elicit partisan responses and regularly do so . . . acting as a lightning-rod for competing feminist visions" (10). As the longest and most explicit articulation of Wollstonecraft's feminist vision(s), the *Vindication*[36] is arguably this lightning-rod's highest point.[37]

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[36] I use "*Vindication*" throughout to refer to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Where I refer to *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, I give its title in full.

[37] For a thoughtful analysis of Wollstonecraft, paradox, and the recent history of Anglo-American feminism, see Susan Gubar's "Feminist misogyny: Mary Wollstonecraft and the paradox of 'it takes one to

This persistent unruliness dogs Wollstonecraft's representations of body and subjectivity, and the criticism which addresses them. At about the same time that body theory exploded the idea of a "biologically inevitable and unquestionable" material body into an array of contested possibilities (Smith-Rosenberg 289), the work of Mary Wollstonecraft began to draw both new attention and intense criticism from fellow feminists. Saba Bahar's survey of Wollstonecraft's twentieth-century critics pinpoints the 1980s as the period in which feminist critics retired their long-standing interest in the symbolic value of her "exemplary life." Instead, they began to reassess her texts "as objects of research and intellectual interest" in their own right, rather than adjuncts to her fascinating biography (1–2).[38] This reassessment, Bahar argues, was largely an analysis of Wollstonecraft's limitations and failings as a feminist author. Critical studies published in the 1980s – Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984) probably being the most influential among them – weighed Wollstonecraft's texts and found them wanting. Her feminism, various analyses suggested, was either misguided or underdeveloped in its formulation(s) of female sexuality, the nature of gendered difference, the politics of discourse, the "Enlightenment project," and/or the situatedness of her own "status and values" (Bahar 2–5). This wave of combined notice and

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know one'" (*Feminism Beside Itself*, ed. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (NY: Routledge, 1995)), pp. 133–54.

[38] Bahar's necessarily general analysis of Wollstonecraft criticism in the 1980s does not specifically mention the more nuanced and situated work of, for example, Janet Todd (*Feminist Literary History* (London: Polity P, 1988)), or G. J. Barker-Benfield ("Mary Wollstonecraft: Eighteenth-century commonweathwoman" (*J Hist of Ideas* 50 (1989): 95–166)) – though these works do appear in Bahar's footnotes (179n).

denigration was, in some ways, a shadow landscape of the 1980s' turbulent feminisms, including their increasingly polarized analyses of the body; according to Susan Gubar, the feminist "in-fighting" of the period, with its "internecine schisms . . . reached a kind of apex in literary criticism" (47). Both the infighting and the literary criticism have since taken new directions, and studies of Wollstonecraft, Bahar notes, have begun to balance out into a body of historically nuanced, judiciously appreciative biographical and critical work (6). The role of bodily subjectivity in Wollstonecraft's texts, however, has not yet been contextualized as fully as other aspects of her work, with the result that critical opinion is widely scattered as to just what kind of body and self Wollstonecraft ascribes to "woman."

This particularly seems to be the case with *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; recent critics have interpreted its representations of body and subjectivity in a multiplicity of ways. Ewa Badowska concentrates them into something fairly similar to the so-called post-modern body, in which an "elusively borderless" female subject "[d]eliberately . . . confuse[s] 'the body' with 'subjectivity'" (295–6). Tom Furniss, on the other hand, maintains that the *Vindication* depicts the body as a sexed, explicitly biological expression of the "law of Nature." This essentialized natural body exists prior to social and political constructions of gender, thus verifying their artificiality: "[n]ot wishing to violate nature's law, Wollstonecraft wrestles with those cultural forces which extend and exploit natural differences" (179). In still another formulation, Wendy Gunther-Canada argues that the *Vindication* in fact "disputes the natural origin of sex differences," and represents the lived experience of gender as only marginally connected to the body: "except for physical strength, all distinctions between the sexes are socially constructed"

(72–3). Finally, Claudia Johnson, comparing depictions of "radical maternity" in Wollstonecraft's various writings, concludes that the "specificity of the female body" is a "strategic nonissue" in the political tracts – including *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (162). This disparity of interpretation could indicate that Wollstonecraft's ideas are not expressed clearly, or that they shifted over time. I would prefer to read this as a sign of the complexity of the text, and suggest that Wollstonecraft's rhetorical strategies shift ground to meet particular political challenges.

What troubles the *Vindication* for some feminists, I believe, is that its depictions of woman's body and subjectivity are radically unstable. While denouncing constructed categories of sexual difference, Wollstonecraft does acknowledge, and even defend, a small category of innate, essential differences based on sex. The "Introduction" to the *Vindication*, for example, affirms that men, as a class, are stronger than women:

> In the government of the physical world it is observable that the female in point of strength is, in general, inferior to the male. This is the law of Nature; and it does not appear to be suspended or abrogated in favour of woman. A degree of physical superiority cannot, therefore, be denied, and it is a noble prerogative! (110)

Wollstonecraft's critics are divided as to how much importance should be granted to depictions such as this, in defining just what kind of body she ascribes to woman. The passage above strikes Gunther-Canada as a small exception within an otherwise coherent critique of essentialism (72). Furniss, on the other hand, focuses on this so-called exception as proof that Wollstonecraft was not categorically opposed to the concept of innate sexual qualities; the fact that she can make an exception at all proves that, in her evaluation, the constructedness of "woman" does have evident material limits (Furniss 179–80). Neither of these mutually exclusive interpretations relies on a misreading, and both are (in their full context) well-argued and plausible. Their inconsistency is, I would argue, a reflection of the nature of their joint source text. The *Vindication* breeds contradictory readings with its typically unsatisfactory mix of materialism and constructivism, essentialism and anti-essentialism. Further, its representations of the body do not occur in one place, as a single unit of analysis; they are dispersed throughout, in rhetorical registers ranging from sentiment (cf. *Vindication* 279–80) to misogyny (Gubar 136–7). Like the text as a whole, the *Vindication*'s representations of body and subjectivity are "full of contentions, digressions, contradictions, and asides" (Todd 186).

This elusiveness has been interpreted by more than one critic as a return of the repressed, with Wollstonecraft attempting to "transcend the body" (Todd 186), and an "unconscious, uncontrollable surfacing of the body" repeatedly disrupting her (Badowska 284). As re-evaluations of Wollstonecraft widen critical focus beyond her 'failures,' the idea that she tried and failed to remove body from the *Vindication* also needs to be re-examined. As a starting point, I would suggest that Wollstonecraft has a limited interest in debating essential sexual difference. Her comment on the "physical superiority" of men over women, for example, is preceded by a disclaimer concerning its relevance to the argument at hand:

> [B]ecause I am a woman, I would not lead my readers to suppose that I mean violently to agitate the contested question respecting the quality or inferiority of the sex; but as the subject lies in my way, and I cannot pass it over without

> subjecting the main tendency of my reasoning to misconstruction, I shall stop a moment to deliver, in a few words, my opinion. (110)

Wollstonecraft does not intend to battle out the nature of woman based on what she is born with – not so long as, even with a "natural preeminence, men endeavour to sink [women] lower still" (110). The "quality or inferiority" pertaining to the female body as part of its essential nature is not one of her primary lines of argument in the *Vindication,* and absorbs far less of her attention, than whatever "raises females in the scale of animal being" (110). The keynote of Wollstonecraft's theory of body is change, and in particular, improvability.

This focus on what *can* change is well-suited to a polemicist and political radical. It also provides Wollstonecraft with a window of escape from the totalizing ontological authority claimed by medical and scientific writers concerning the nature of female body and subjectivity, especially where the deeply politicized issue of maternal nursing is concerned. Wollstonecraft is authorizing herself in this ontological discourse, in order to be able to redeploy it for her own "utopian dreams" of female development. She does acknowledges a material female body, and even limits this body to its reproductive potentials; her condemnation of women who voluntarily terminate pregnancies, for example, appeals to what "nature . . . intended" for the reproductive body of woman (274–5). These limits, however, are the starting point for change. In her repeated invocations of "Reason," she is attempting a shift of focus from what a woman must be, to the far more contestable ground of what woman might become, whatever her essential nature:

> Reason is . . . the simple power of improvement; or, more properly speaking, of discerning truth. Every individual is in this respect a world in itself. More or less may be conspicuous in one being than another; but the nature of reason must be the same in all . . . . (167)

Generic categories based upon body, such as "man" and "woman," are relevant only insofar as they have a perceptible impact within that particular individual's unique "world." The "power of improvement," on the other hand, is generalizable, though some individuals' potential in this regard "may be more conspicuous" than that of others. Like the vitalism which formed part of her local intellectual culture, her idea of body and subjectivity focuses on functions rather than structures.

Wollstonecraft's depictions of bodily subjectivity therefore centre on developmental, rather than phylogenic, differences among bodies. It is in this context that she refers to "the scale of animal being" (110). Animals, she explains, act as directed by "unerring instinct" (144). Although, quoting Lord Monboddo's *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, she concedes that "their natural instinct is improved by the culture *we* bestow upon them" (167), this is the natural limit of their developmental potential. Children are born with the same kind of instincts and affections as animals, but, superadded to these, have the capacity to develop faculties beyond "instinct merely animal" (274), and to undertake "the important task of learning to think and reason" (128). Innate developmental capacity, however, is vulnerable at every point to environmental influence, and it is on this influence that Wollstonecraft focuses her critique of sexual difference:

> [A]voiding, as I have hitherto done, any direct comparison of the two sexes collectively, or frankly acknowledging the inferiority of woman, according to the present appearance of things, I shall only insist that men have increased that inferiority till women are almost sunk below the standard of rational creatures. Let their faculties have room to unfold, and their virtues to gain strength, and then determine where the whole sex must stand in the intellectual scale. (145)

Whether there is an innate, bodily difference of developmental capacity between men and women, she argues, can only be decided once women's potential has "room to unfold." Until the pressures that actively limit women to a level of moral development "below the standard of rational creatures" have been removed, all ontological pronouncements on the nature of woman must be speculative.[39]

The fact that Wollstonecraft admits the existence an essential maternal body, therefore, is not necessarily a concession that anatomy is destiny. This body is, instead, the rhetorical prerequisite for inserting herself into the battle for ontological high ground in pronouncing upon female – and, in particular, maternal – bodily experience. In this sense, Wollstonecraft's representations of the reproductive body of woman have the potential to overturn the ontological arguments of contemporaneous medical and scientific discourse. The reproductive definition of woman is one she accepts and even endorses, arguing that the boundaries of "woman" and "mother" (or at least "potential mother"), are co-extensive: "I would rest the whole tendency of my reasoning upon it, [that] whatever tends to incapacitate the maternal character, takes woman out of her sphere" (321). By reinscribing these boundaries, restrictive as they are in terms of woman's "sphere," she demonstrates her own right to pronounce ontologically on "woman."[40]

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[39] My analysis of instinct and morality in the *Vindication* is indebted to Nancy Yousef's study of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, in which she argues that "the widely held hypothesis of instinctive or natural sympathy effectively cordons off human relationships from the relentlessly skeptical analysis that contemporaneous philosophy of human understanding had brought to bear on the knowledge of objects" (542). See "Wollstonecaft, Rousseau and the revision of romantic subjectivity" (*Studies in Romanticism* 38.4 (1999)), pp. 537–57.

These are the credentials she brings to her depiction of the nursing breast. The *Vindication*'s version of the sentimental tableau of maternal nursing, for example, plays fast and loose with the ontological conventions of contemporary nursing literature. Where this scene would typically transfer the lived experience of breastfeeding from the instinctive mother to the feeling father (who may also colonize the subjectivity of the nursing child), Wollstonecraft's re-visioning grants subjectivity to all participants – provided their natural developmental capacities have not been stunted:

> Cold would be the heart of a husband, were he not rendered unnatural by early debauchery, who did not feel more delight at seeing his child suckled by its mother than the most artful wanton tricks could ever raise . . . . The maternal solicitude of a reasonable affectionate woman is very interesting . . . . (279)

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[40] I am rely here in part on Joan Mulholland's detailed study of the political method in the *Vindication*'s rhetorical madness, in "Constructing woman's authority: A study of Wollstonecraft's rhetoric in her *Vindication*, 1792" (*Mary Wollstonecraft and the Critics, 1788–2001* (ed. Harriet Devine Jump (NY: Routledge, 2003)) pp. 181–97. In this article, she challenges the idea that Wollstonecraft's grasp of style and structure in the *Vindication* is limited or insufficient. "Wollstonecraft's prime goal in writing was to persuade" a wide and varied audience of stakeholders, Mulholland argues, ". . . so her task was an extremely complex one, and one might assume her persuasive tactics would vary as a result" (182).

In this formulation, it is the husband, not the mother, who is depicted as potentially unnatural. In any case, Wollstonecraft has a low opinion of the developmental potentials inherent in a susceptible sensibility:

> And what is sensibility? "Quickness of sensation, quickness of perception, delicacy." Thus is it defined by Dr. Johnson. and the definition gives me no other idea than of the most exquisitely polished instinct. I discern not a trace of the image of God in either sensation or matter. Refined seventy times seven they are still material; intellect dwells not there; nor will fire ever make lead gold! (180)

The rapturous father of contemporary nursing literature, whose response to maternal nursing is merely sentimental, is having, in other words, an irrelevant, purely instinctual experience. The paternal tears of sensibility highlighted in *Letters to Married Women* (77) count for very little in the *Vindication.*[41]

The mother's lived experience of breastfeeding does, however, have an impact beyond her own subjectivity. Wollstonecraft uses the word "sympathy" to describe only four kinds of relationship, that between: reader and writer (214, 221, 231); lover and beloved (in what she assumes to be a heterosexual relationship) (182, 248); individual and humanity (271, 304, 316); and parent and child (273, 291, 295). In only one passage does she, as speaker, apply the term to herself, and this occurs in her tableau of maternal nursing. The quotation given above continues its description as follows:

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[41] Wollstonecraft does make substantial use of sentimental discourse in other areas – for example, as a structuring element. See Syndy McMillen Conger's "The sentimental logic of Wollstonecraft's prose" (*Prose Studies* 10.2 (1987)), pp. 143–58.

> So singular, indeed, are my feelings--and I have endeavoured not to catch factitious ones--that after having been fatigued with the sight of insipid grandeur and the slavish ceremonies that with cumbrous pomp supplied the place of domestic affections, I have turned to some other scene to relieve my eye. . . . I have then viewed with pleasure a woman nursing her children, and discharging the duties of her station. . . . My heart has loitered in the midst of the group, and has even throbbed with sympathetic emotion when the scraping of the well-known foot has raised a pleasing tumult. (279-80)[42]

There are relatively few moments in the *Vindication* in which Wollstonecraft allows herself an extended use of the kind of passionate, imaginative description that typifies the language of her novels and letters.[43] These are rhetorical highlights within the intricate structure of the text, and are therefore worthy of particular attention. The first, and probably most famous, imitates the survey "from China to Peru" in Samuel Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), and has the reader accompany the speaker as she "from an eminence survey[s] the world stripped of all its false delusive charms" (237-9). The second, and less commented upon, passage of extended imaginative description, is this reverie of maternal nursing. Unlike the "survey" fantasy, which takes place, grammatically, in the dramatic present, her scene of maternal nursing takes place in the past, as a particular moment of feeling fully experienced and remembered – and not a "factitious" sentiment. Most importantly, she includes in her description the *Vindication*'s most explicit and extended reference to "sympathetic emotion." By means of sympathy, she not only shares, directly and personally, in the experiences of the nursing group ("[m]y heart has loitered in the midst"), but becomes, subjectively, a literal part of it, experiencing the same sensations (the "scraping" sound "of the well-known foot") and personal responses ("throbb[ing]" in unison with the "pleasant tumult"). The 'natural' effect the sight of a nursing mother produces is, according to this depiction, a subjective intimacy of feeling which communicates across both personal ("heart") and social ("group") boundaries.

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[42] I interpret this sentence to mean the sound of the father's foot on the threshold, as he returns from some other occupation in the public sphere, triggers a tumult among the members of his affectionate household.

[43] For a detailed study of how Wollstonecraft's representations of maternity in her novels differ from those in the *Vindication*, see Claudia L. Johnson's "Mary Wollstonecraft: Styles of radical maternity" (*Inventing Maternity: Politics, Science, and Literature, 1650–1865*, ed. Susan C. Greenfield and Carol Barash (Lexington KY: UP of Kentucky, 1999)), pp. 159–71.

This speculative ontology of maternal nursing – in which the mother's lived experiences are an origin and a part of persistent communal feelings, which extend throughout the family unit and beyond – is a political challenge to the instinctive mother of late-century nursing literature. On the face of it, Wollstonecraft's description of a breastfeeding mother strongly resembles the sentimental scenes of nursing included in texts ranging from *The Art of Preventing Diseases* to *The Semi-Globes*. Its language is heightened, its primary viewpoint rests with an observer, and its agendas clearly include the promotion of maternal breastfeeding. By opposing the "relief" the nursing mother supplies, however, to a "fatigue" occasioned by "insipid grandeur," the passage extends its political agenda. While Wollstonecraft is quite serious in her endorsement of maternal breastfeeding – her repeated animadversions on "the present race of weak [i.e., non-nursing] mothers" (321) are proof of this – her primary target is not the silly beauty who cuddles her dogs instead of nursing her children (316–7). The entities which threaten to replace or obliterate the experience Wollstonecraft describes are associated with class inequity ("pomp suppl[ying] the place of domestic affections") and male dominance ("rendered unnatural by early debauchery"). While the *Vindication* fulminates elsewhere against the mother who *fails* to "discharge . . . the duties of her station" by nursing (279), in its utopian dreams of successful maternal breastfeeding, the text speculates on the existence of a nursing experience which links bodily subjectivity and political concerns.

Wollstonecraft's complex reworking of late-century representations of maternal nursing is, like her ontological stance on woman, focused on development rather than on innate qualities. While she argues of women that "bearing and nursing children" is "one of the grand ends of their being" (274), the essentialist standard which she sets for maternal breastfeeding relies on reason for its achievement. The carefully-articulated subjective importance which the *Vindication* attaches to maternal nursing is thus part of its multi-pronged attack on the complex of environmental forces which "depress" women "from their cradles" (336). Whatever inhibits the development of a mother's reason also threatens maternal nursing; this allows the text to denounce the eroticization of women (274), the cultural tyranny of the 'feminine' ("according to the masculine acceptation of the word") (316), the gendered inequities of "civil law" (274), the suppression of women's independence (296–7), and the restrictions on female education (337) – all on the specific basis that these tend to inhibit maternal nursing behaviour. In the same way that the mother's lived experience of nursing, in Wollstonecraft's depiction, expands to include the subjectivities of a larger community, the responsibility for maternal nursing behavior extends beyond the individual mother, to include every political and cultural structure which might suppress women's development into "rational creatures and free citizens" (323). Wollstonecraft's intention is not to create the kind of authoritative definition of maternal nursing which medical discourse attempted to construct in her lifetime. Instead, she repurposes their own ontological strategy to include and expand the role which the lived experiences of nursing mothers plays in defining the status of women and the responsibilities of the community as a whole.

In a way, I find it alarming to read Wollstonecraft as reinscribing some of the elements of prescriptive nursing literature, however subversive her reinscription might be. Her superlative credentials as a rebel, including her self-representation as a figure whose "singular . . . feelings" (279) set her apart, make it tempting to place her always at the furthest pole of difference from her political targets. In speaking of the body and its experiences, however, the *Vindication*, like *Belinda*, and like Burney's mastectomy narrative, aims at agency within a shared domain. In my conclusion, I read Burney's text as an attempt to repurpose her suffering as a link between her bodily experiences and those of her readers.

## Conclusion: Breast reconstruction

To what extent, if any, has this analysis of subjective bodily experience in late-eighteenth-century texts brought us closer to knowing how Frances Burney felt when she underwent a mastectomy? The conceptual difficulties I encountered in her first-person account emblematize larger issues in the critical interpretation of body and self. Feminist body theory, in my reading of it, faces the same primary obstacle I identified in the Introduction to this dissertation: a defect of imagination in confronting the historical and cultural situatedness of bodily subjectivity. Body theory has a demonstrated tendency to polarize discussions of breasted experience (and embodiment in general), which encourages critics to overlook possibilities which are not also poles of difference. Further, deep-laid ideologies of body as threat or limitation, particularly where bodily agency is involved, sometimes manifest as somatophobia in critical analysis. Finally, feminist body theorists have a well-founded reluctance to look to empirical science for models of embodiment which actually might help provide a richer field of possibilities for conceptualizing the body. As literary critics, how we read Burney is an index to how we locate bodily subjectivity as a literary-critical category.

This project has, I hope, helped to establish that – in the same way that the body has a history, and subjectivity has a history – bodily subjectivity, the lived experience of “how it feels” to be a certain body, has a history also. The possibilities that constituted Burney’s discourse of bodily subjectivity differ substantially from our own; her pain and her relief acknowledge no intrinsic separation of body and mind, no necessary barrier of sensation between her body and others, and no conundrum of reference in their transfer to language. Using breastedness to mediate between our own lived experience, and how

Burney felt, is not to colonize her bodily subjectivity with our own. To do so would be to deny her experience – its extremity, the unique courage it inspired, and the historical circumstances that made it possible – the respect that it deserves as part of a woman's life. To assume, however, that no part of this experience can survive the distances of history and culture, is to show another kind of disrespect. Whatever fragments of her bodily subjectivity can be salvaged, like shards of ancient pottery, deserve careful study in an attempt to recuperate, through a critical analysis of the specificity of lived experience, what the whole might once have been.

This kind of critical endeavour is not a radical departure from existing methods of scholarship. I have suggested that the practice of feminist body theory acknowledges empiricism in ways that its critical theory seldom recognizes – tacitly accepting certain generalizations about (in Searle's words) "the way the world works" (93). I would further argue that its practice also recognizes more about the situatedness of lived experience than has yet to find its way to the foreground of its explicit theorizations of embodiment. That said, literary critics are already observing and writing about bodily experience in ways that acknowledge possibilities beyond dichotomous oppositions of body and mind, materiality and construction, empiricism and theory. Two recent readings of Burney's mastectomy narrative, for example, observe more about the role of subjective bodily experience in this text than they allow themselves to discuss in academic terms. Both readings frame themselves using paired opposites. Julia Epstein's "Writing the unspeakable" invokes dichotomy by describing the document as one which "could only have been written by someone with a capacity to displace herself from her own body," and argues that it "detaches Burney the writing voice from Burney the physical body"

(152). Heidi Kaye's "'This breast – it's me'" also includes structuring binaries, analyzing Burney's text as a struggle over the opposed subject and object positions determined by "gaze" (51). In an interesting correlation, however, both critics take the trouble to describe Burney's narrative as a kind of subjective bodily experience for the reader. Epstein says of the text that its "tension make[s] it nearly unbearable to read" (146). Similarly, Kaye claims that "one involuntarily winces when reading" (48), and that "it is almost as painful to read as it must have been for her to write" (43).[1] By including these observations, Epstein and Kaye identify and acknowledge an aspect of the text where the experiences of reader and writer seem to interlock, in a consensual domain.

My own analysis of Burney's account finds ample evidence that Burney both expects and deliberately provokes this kind of response from her readers. Other critics have already noted how the structure of her narrative imitates the experiences it describes. Epstein, for example, offers the following summary:

> The long section leading up to the day of surgery imitates and reenacts the drawn-out waiting period Burney endured, and the speeded up, virtually out-of-control, catapulting prose that describes the surgery itself, periodically and abruptly halted by the agonizingly repeated false sense that it was over, then follows the slow, tense, opening pages. (140)

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[1] Epstein and Kaye are not the first to make such observations. Joyce Hemlow, for example, comments in her 1958 biography of Burney that the narrative's readers must choose "either to enter the gruesome operating-theatre, feel the cutting and hear the screams, or to turn over the leaf" (322). In my discussion of the transmission of bodily subjectivity in the late eighteenth century, it is important to note that the content of this communication could vary widely, including pain, but also pleasure and many other kinds of lived experience.

Burney's strategies for involving her readers, however, go beyond this structural mimesis. The document purports, for example, to be simply evidence, provided to certain family members because "if they should hear that I have been dangerously ill from any hand but my own, they might have doubts of my perfect recovery which my own alone can obviate" (598). Her account nonetheless includes far more than the description of her illness's "extent, & its circumstances, as well as its termination" (589) which the opening page promises. Its excess, in fact, is one of its more remarkable qualities. A document meant only to inform and reassure is under no necessity to include harrowing details such as the resistance her flesh offers to the surgeon's knife, or the sensation of air on the raw wound (612). Her claim for her narrative – that it is designed to "spare . . . kind hearts any grief for me but what they must inevitably feel in reflecting upon the sorrow of . . . absence" (598) – is fictive; the physician's report attached to Burney's original letter is far less shocking to read than her putative attempt at "spar[ing]" her readers. The letter's close contains a similarly fictive element: in a postscript, she urges her primary correspondent to read "this Narrative at [her] leisure, & without emotion," since "all has ended happily" (615). The author must have known the impossibility of such a request; the postscript, coming last, would give its instructions too late, and its admonition to read such an account "without emotion" would be unreasonable at whatever point in the text it appeared.

This strange narrative wrapper of non-existent comfort and impossible serenity could simply be a symptom of the writer's poor physical and mental health. At the time she wrote, the physical act of using a pen was still difficult as a result of her surgery, as it would be for the remainder of her life. Due to the mental distress involved in recounting her mastectomy, she also claims to have done little or no editing of her text before sending it out to its primary readers (613). It is therefore possible that the oddities of her letter's opening and postscript are simply the inconsistencies of someone writing without revision, while under physical and emotional stress. I think my research, however, suggests an alternative reading. In Chapter 1, I have outlined three principles specific to "how it felt" in Burney's historical and cultural context: that it acknowledged no essential boundaries separating body, self, and affect; that it could be communicated across bodies; and that it could also communicate from one body to another by means of a mediating representation, such as text or image. Using this situated understanding of bodily subjectivity, other possibilities in Burney's text become visible. Her mastectomy experience could communicate itself in a literal sense, from her own body to those of observers, through the writing experience back to herself, and through the text to her readers. If we take her narrative at its word, she no longer appears in it as a woman suspended in struggle between poles of difference, involving mind and body, or self and other. Instead, she reveals herself maintaining an agential role in a mutual ontogenic structural coupling involving many other participants, including her friends, physicians, correspondents – and, judging by the fact that she did eventually make editorial changes to the text, a wider audience as well.

If Burney is assuming this agential role in "how it feels," then a likelier possibility may be that the letter's narrative wrapper is a deliberately deployed heightening device, aimed at intensifying the reader's subjective experience of the text. In the same way that one of her own physicians "uttered so many charges to [her] to be tranquil . . . that [she] could not but suspect there was room for terrible inquietude" (600), Burney, by enclosing her mastectomy narrative within expectations of "spared . . . grief" and absent "emotion," potentially amplifies the reader's distress and alarm, creating a mimesis of lived experience. The mastectomy thus becomes a shared moment, and the suffering a new form of consensual domain between Burney and her readers. Throughout the text, she communicates her certain reliance on the sympathy and concern of all those to whom she desires her letter to be shown. On one occasion, she says, in a curious turn of phrase, that her friend Mrs. Angerstein "will pardon, I well know, my sparing myself – which is sparing her, a separate letter upon such a theme" (615). Since Mrs. Angerstein is one of the readers for whom the narrative is intended, Burney cannot here be referring to the contents of a possible "separate letter": it is hard to imagine that it could have been any more harrowing to read than the letter she actually sent. She seems to be voicing her confidence in a power of sympathy which makes her friend necessarily a participant in any suffering Burney might experience or be spared. She chooses, then, in the letter she did write, to spare neither herself nor her readers, since to share an experience intensely, even if this experience is horrible, is a communication of intimacy. This may have been especially precious to Burney at a time when international warfare separated her from most of her family and friends (598, Doody 313–14).

The letter's narrative wrapper is only one instance in which Burney attempts to manage interactions involving lived experience, both in her text and in the events it describes. Her exchange with M. Dubois immediately prior to the surgery, for example, is a negotiation of feeling between the two:

> My distress was, I suppose, apparent, though not my Wishes, for M. Dubois himself now softened, & spoke soothingly. Can *You*, I cried, feel for an operation

> that, to *You*, must seem so trivial? – trivial? he repeated – taking up a bit of paper, which he tore, unconsciously, into a million of pieces . . . he stammered, & could not go on . . . . I was softened myself, when I saw even M. Dubois grow agitated . . . . (611)

Epstein interprets this exchange as Burney expressing her "resentment" towards Dubois with a "reproach" (144). Given the specificity of bodily subjectivity in this context, however, I would argue that she is verifying the sympathetic bond between herself and the physician overseeing the mastectomy. She will not submit to his authority until she has proof that even a Napoleonic surgeon such as Dubois, veteran of hundreds of appalling battlefield amputations, is not too hardened to be able to share in her bodily experience of the surgery. Once he demonstrates his participation in her "distaste & horrour," she relents in her previous resistance to his commands and "mount[s] . . . unbidden, the Bedstead" (610-11). According to her account, she keeps her eye on this kind of consensual interaction throughout her mastectomy experience.

Chapter 2's investigation of the epistemological consequences of this permeable and communicable model of lived experience also has a bearing on Burney's text. The characters in Edgeworth's *Belinda*, as they try to make sense of the knowledges one body can provide to another, are bedeviled by both difficulties and possibilities. Edgeworth's multifaceted comic treatment of what can and can't be known about the experiences of another body maintains a tone of guarded optimism and a stance of empirical modesty. Burney, according to her narrative, encounters her own set of difficulties and possibilities involving her own body's communicative potentials, and actively manipulates them. While her text could hardly differ more from Edgeworth's in its emotional tone, it presents a similar depiction of the struggle to master the possibilities and strategies of knowing "how it feels."

Excluding her husband from her mastectomy experience, for example, meant having to identify and suppress whatever might make it known to him, at least until the surgery had been completed. Her most effective strategy is simply to decoy him away from the scene of the operation, but she must also, on occasion, withhold the subjective impact of a particular moment from his sensibilities. For example, she receives two hours' notice of the surgery (in writing) while her husband stands beside her. "Judge, my Esther," she writes to her sister, "if I read this unmoved! – yet I had to disguise my sensations & intentions from M. d'A.!" (608). This is not a mere inconvenience in carrying out her "plan of silence" (598) – she is uncertain as to how much of her experience she can keep from his knowledge: "[s]uch was my terror of involving M. d'A. . . . that it conquered every other, & gave me the force to act as if I were directing some third person" (608). Epstein characterizes this as a detachment which transforms Burney into "the pseudo-objective observer" (145-6). Another possible reading, however, is that she deploys this subjective "third person" to manage the situation by withdrawing her actual lived experience and substituting another. If bodily experience is highly permeable and communicable, then dissociation is the only step she can take to control who knows what about how she feels. There is a sense in which her self-created "third person" enforces an interpretation of her lived experience upon her husband.

She is less successful in negotiating consensual domains with her physicians. In Chapter 3, I have argued that late-century medical discourse monopolized the ontology of breasted experience, in order to avoid the kind of epistemological entanglements which would require them to grant at least some authority to the breasted patient. Burney's narrative depicts her participating personally in this political arena, interrogating the authority of her doctors to declare on the existence and nature of her breast's disease. She claims the right to self-diagnose based on the fact that she knows how she feels, and during much of the eighteenth century, this information would have been crucial in diagnosing cancer. Contemporary pathology recognized many kinds of masses in the breast, and an important means of distinguishing among them was the type of pain reported by the patient (Wallis 665). In Burney's case, however, her report counts for nothing. When she realizes that the surgeons plan to remove the entire breast, she starts up, takes the breast in her own hand, and "explain[s] the nature of [her] sufferings" (611–12) – which suggest localized disease. The surgeons listen in silence, replace her in a supine position, and perform the radical mastectomy. It is at this point that she becomes "desperate, & self-given up" (612). While space remains for her to negotiate agency by and about her subjective experiences, whether by testing her doctors' sensibilities or outwitting those of her husband, she is not a passive figure. The totalizing authority of medicine, however, which makes the way her breast feels irrelevant to what her breast is, finally conquers her stubborn agency and reduces it to resignation.

I would argue that the difference between my initial reading of Burney's narrative, and the reading given above, is the distance I have traveled towards knowing how she felt. Much of her account was simply inexplicable to me on a first reading: its excess, its duplicity, its ambiguous personal interactions. By analyzing what particular kind of lived experiences were possible in the late eighteenth century, what kind of knowledges they permitted or interrupted, and what political changes depended on them for success, I found myself able to engage critically with the very elements which had been the most puzzling. I do not believe that literary analyses 'solve' texts, but rather, that by multiplying tenable readings, we enrich our objects of inquiry. By considering bodily subjectivity as a cultural object, and by admitting the evidence of the body itself, whether from the life sciences or the disciplines of bodily mindfulness,[2] it may be possible to recuperate the lived experiences of women – including breastedness. If bodily subjectivity is a consensual domain, rather than a set of binaries, if it is a historically and culturally situated object, rather than a universal, this creates many opportunities to locate new alternatives, options, and agencies in body theory, and in critical practice which focuses on the body's role in discourse.

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[2] It is one of the frustrations of dealing with this topic that so few terms exist which describe it accurately. "Bodily mindfulness" is a very unsatisfactory phrase, in that it implies that an independent mind is taking notice of a body. "Mindly bodifulness," ridiculous as this neologism is, comes quite a bit closer to describing the experiences of a Buddhist practitioner or an athlete.

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